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HISTORY OF
THE ABBEY OF ST. ALBAN

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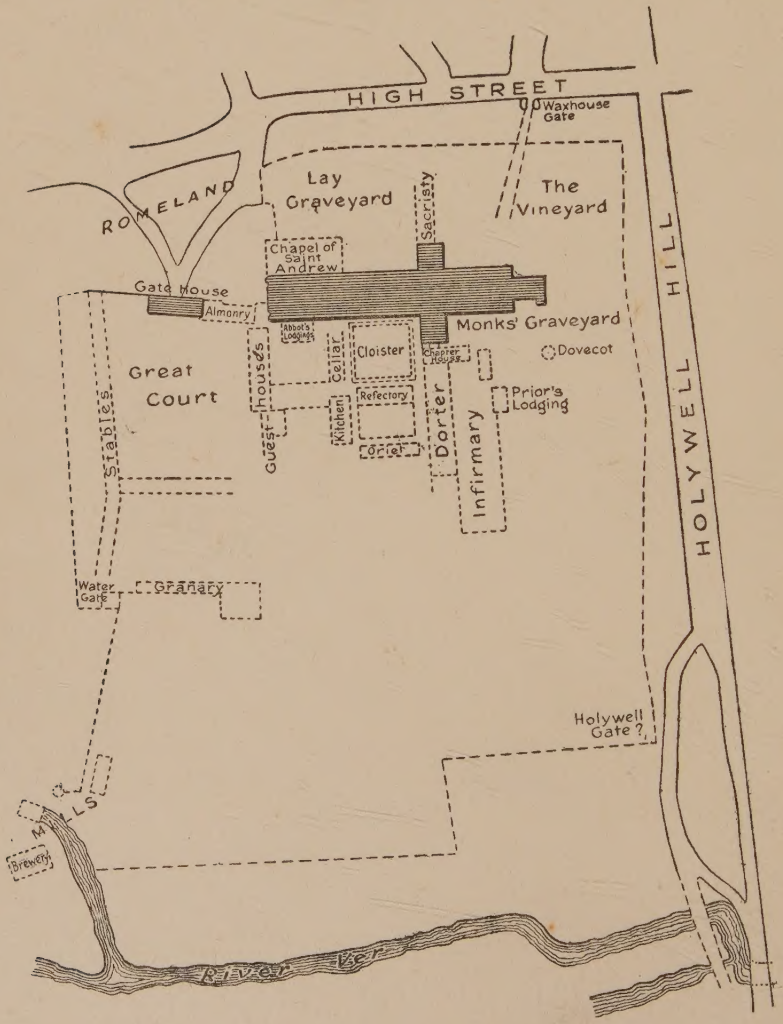

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HISTORY

OF THE

ABBEY OF ST. ALBAN

BY

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PREFACE.

In the following pages an attempt is made to present, within reasonable compass, the history of one of the greatest of English Abbeys. Should excuse be sought for a book so small which deals with a subject so large, it may be found in the fact that the treatment of authorities is eclectic rather than exhaustive. By the sacrifice of much that is curious and of a little that is important, it has been possible to construct a duly-balanced, if summary, narrative of the life-history of St. Albans. In accordance with this plan matters economic, despite the masses of material which are in existence concerning them, have not been allowed to usurp more than their due share of attention. They are treated only in such detail as suffices to ensure an appreciation of the part they played among the other activities of the Abbey.

At the risk of some infringement of the continuity of history, it has seemed best to emphasize the break caused by the death of each abbot, not because the end of an abbot's rule, like the termination of a king's reign, is a convenient point at which to conclude a chapter, but because the history of a Benedictine House is primarily a resultant of the various impulses supplied by the personalities of those individuals who guided its destinies.

All Souls College, 1914.

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THE ABBOTS OF ST. ALBANS.

1. (*Willigod*)	*floruit circa* A.D. 796?	
2. (*Eadric*)	„	810?
3. (*Wulsig*)	„	830?
4. (*Wulnoth*)	„	860?
5. (*Eadfrith*)	„	880?
6. (*Wulsin*)	„	900?
7. (*Alfric I*)	„	920?
8. (*Ealdred*)	„	940?
9. (*Eadmar*)	„	960?
10. Alfric II	*circa* 970 to 990.	
11. Leofric	990 to *circa* 1030.	
12. Leofstan	*circa* 1030 to 1064.	
13. Fretheric	1064 to 1077.	
14. Paul	1077 (28 June) to 1093 (11 November).	
15. Richard I	elected between November, 1097, and March, 1098, to 16 May, 1119.	
16. Geoffrey	summer 1119 to 25 February, 1146.	
17. Ralph	8 May, 1146, to 6 July, 1151.	
18. Robert I	(? blessed) 18 June, 1151, to 23 October, 1166.	
19. Simon	(blessed) 20 May, 1167, to (summer?) 1183.	
20. Waurin	(blessed) 8 September, 1183, to 29 April, 1195.	
21. John I	20 July, 1195, to 16 July, 1214.	
22. William I	30 November, 1214, to 24 February, 1235.	
23. John II	*congé d'élire* 28 February: (blessed) 13 August, 1235, to 19 April, 1263.	
24. Roger	(Papal confirmation) 9 September, 1263, to 3 November, 1290.	
25. John III	9 December, 1290, to 19? October, 1301.	
26. John IV	2 January, 1302, to 23 February, 1309.	
27. Hugh	(*congé d'élire*) 28 February, 1309, to night of 7-8 September, 1327.	

28.	RICHARD II	29 October, 1327,[1] to 23 May, 1336.
29.	MICHAEL	1 June, 1336, to 12 April, 1349.
30.	THOMAS I	(before 28 May, 1349), to 15 September, 1396.
31.	JOHN V	9 October, 1396, to 11 November, 1401.
32.	WILLIAM II	12 December, 1401, to August, 1419.
33.	JOHN VI	*congé d'élire* 5 August, 1420, (temporalities restored) 23 October, 1420, resigned 26 November, 1440.
34.	JOHN VII	(*congé d'élire*) 28 November, 1440, to 14 December, 1451.
35.	JOHN VI	re-elected 16 January, 1452, to 20 January, 1465.
36.	WILLIAM III	31 January, 1465, to 1 July, 1476.
37.	WILLIAM IV	5 August, 1476, to June, 1492.
38.	THOMAS II	(*congé d'élire*) 29 June, 1492, to ? December, 1521.
39.	THOMAS III	(temporalities restored) 7 December, 1521, abbacy resigned 17 February, 1530, death of Abbot, 29 November, 1530.
40.	ROBERT II	December, 1530, to (deprived) January, 1538.
41.	RICHARD III	(temporalities restored, 10 April, 1538), surrendered 5 December, 1539.

N.B.—The dates of the first dozen Abbots are mainly conjectural, and a comparison of this list with the one given on pp. 414-15 of "V.C.H. Herts," vol. iv., will show how difficult it is to arrive at any satisfactory conclusion in regard to them.

[1] This election was not in order. The Papal provision dates from 1 February, 1328.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.

C.P.R.	Calendar of the Patent Rolls.
C.C.R.	Calendar of the Close Rolls.
C.Ch.R.	Calendar of Charter Rolls.
C.P.L.	Calendar of Papal Letters.
C. Pet.	Calendar of Petitions.
C.L.P.	Calendar of Letters and Papers (Henry VIII).
Gesta.	Gesta Abbatum Mon. S. Albani (Rolls Series).
R.S.	Rolls Series.
V.C.H.	Victoria County History.
R.C.	Record Commission.

Nec homines aliter scire arbitrantur unumquodque, nisi cum causas illius primas et principia prima cognoverint usque ad elementa.—MARSIGLIO OF PADUA.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

THE martyrdom of St. Alban and the foundation of the abbey which bears his name, are alike wrapped in deep obscurity. The historian who desires to investigate either the one or the other finds himself at the outset baffled, not so much by lack of information, as by the difficulty of the task of disentangling fact from fiction. This is hardly a matter for surprise. For seven centuries there persisted, in the brethren of St. Albans Abbey, a body of men who deemed it a duty to enhance the reputation of their Patron and the glorious antiquity of the House over which he presided. Stimulated by pious zeal, successive generations sought for the minutest details of the martyr's death, and for the precise circumstances of the foundation of the Abbey. The brethren felt themselves in duty bound to supplement the deficiency of early information regarding matters so important. Accordingly, incidents were fabricated, dates were discovered, version after version was produced, each more full and better informed than the last. In consequence, the original facts became by degrees overlaid with a mass of fictitious detail. Indeed, the more circumstantial and convincing the version, the later and less trustworthy does it prove to be.

What may be called the orthodox account of the end of St. Alban and the beginning of his Abbey is presented by the thirteenth-century historian Matthew Paris. The greatest writer of which his House can boast—a House unsurpassed in England alike for the quantity and for the quality of its historical production—in this matter at least he has done no good service to the cause of History. He cannot be charged with deliberate fabrication ; he did but put into literary form

the tradition current in his day. But so convincing was the resulting story that it was accepted at its face value by Dugdale [1] in the seventeenth, and by Newcome [2] in the eighteenth century; and even to-day [3] it is not without its influence. Despite recent advances in critical method, no attempt has hitherto been made to substitute history for legend. In the present chapter an endeavour will be made to ascertain the facts, and thence to determine how much, or how little, truth is contained in the traditional story.

There seems, in the first place, no reason to doubt that a man named Albanus died for the Christian faith some time near the beginning of the fourth century. St. Germanus, who was Bishop of Auxerre from 418 to 448, dedicated a church [4] to him, and this must serve as reply to those who would consign St. Alban to the region of pious myth. A well-marked tradition, which can be traced at least as far back as the sixth century, places the martyrdom at the Roman municipium of Verulamium, and connects it with a persecution ordered by the Emperor Diocletian, who reigned from September 284 to May 305. Whether that persecution extended to Britain at all has indeed been questioned by high authority,[5] but the arguments of the Rev. Hugh Williams [6] show that the probabilities favour the traditional view. It is not easy to determine the precise year of St. Alban's passion. The Laud MS. of the Chronicle places it under the year 286, but this date is not convincing. From that precise year until 296, the phantom emperors Carausius and Allectus successively ruled Britain in defiance of central authority; and it is reasonable to suppose that the years 296 to 305 constitute the only period of Diocletian's rule in which persecution could have taken place

[1] "Monasticon Anglicanum," vol. ii.

[2] "History of the Abbey of St. Albans." London, 1793.

[3] "Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England), Hertford," pp. 8, 9.

[4] Bouquet, "Recueil des Historiens," 172. Haddan and Stubbs, "Councils," i. 6.

[5] Haddan and Stubbs, "Councils," i. 6.

[6] Gildas, "De excidio Britanniae," edited by H. Williams, i. 26.

in Britain by his orders. As a matter of fact, the year 303 witnessed the promulgation of two successive edicts against the Christians, and it seems probable that the martyrdom of St. Alban should be placed at some point between 303 and 305.

The earliest surviving account of it, however, dates only from the middle of the sixth century, and is to be found in the works of Gildas. In view of the disturbances produced by the Teutonic invasions of Britain, the absence of earlier mention of the saint is hardly surprising ; but it is unfortunate that at the beginning of the inquiry no better guide than Gildas is available. His love of turgid invective, his ignorance, and his prejudice, constitute additional difficulties of no mean order. Moreover, at the time when he wrote, the facts of the martyrdom had already become interwoven with imaginary detail.[1] His account may be summarized as follows :—

Albanus, a Roman legionary stationed at Verulam, sheltered from persecution a Christian confessor, and embraced his faith. Donning the garments of his guest, he went forth to suffer in his stead. After trial and condemnation, Albanus was hurried out of the city to the place of execution. On the way thither, he came to a river, called the Thames, over which was a bridge, crowded with eager spectators. Impatient of delay, Albanus plunged into the stream, which dried up before his feet, so that he passed over dryshod. When at length he reached the fatal spot, his calm dignity so wrought upon the headsman that no threats could induce him to perform his office. Another executioner being procured, Albanus and his involuntary convert suffered together.

The general character of this account seems to prove that the author had before him some early written Acta of the saint. Probably through a misunderstanding of the words of his source, Gildas was led to introduce the miraculous element into his story. The river Ver, which separates the site o Verulam from the place of execution, is a meagre stream, nowhere unfordable. The account from which Gildas took his material probably spoke of the martyr as walking across the

[1] "De excidio Britanniae," cc. 10, 11.

stream because the narrow Roman bridge was so crowded as to be impassable. Now Gildas had certainly never visited the locality, which in his day had long been in the hands of the Saxons he hated so heartily.[1] With the misdirected zeal for accuracy that always characterizes his work, he proceeded to identify the anonymous stream of the old Acta with the one river which he knew to exist somewhere in the neighbourhood —the Thames. He was thus driven to assume a miraculous explanation of the consequences of mere local peculiarities. And from the condition of the story as it comes from his pen, it may well be argued that he must have had a moderately straightforward account before him. Had this not been the case, our knowledge of his literary methods would lead us to expect more embellishment than is actually found.

At the end of the story Gildas gives us his most important piece of information. He says that when the days of persecution were over, the British Christians lavished much care on the construction of basilicas in honour of their martyred brethren. In these buildings feast-days were celebrated, and the sacred offices were performed with holy joy. It is true that among the martyrs thus commemorated, Gildas does not specifically mention St. Alban; but in view of the important place he assigns to him in the narrative, it is safe to assume that he considered him among the most prominent of the sufferers, and hence, it must be supposed, among those to whom the honour would first be rendered. The fact that an author of the sixth century believed that a church had been erected to St. Alban within a few years of the date of his death, is one to be kept carefully in mind.

The next mention of St. Alban is found some thirty years later. It comes from the pen of Venantius Fortunatus, who

[1] It is possible that in this early occupation by the Angles of the country associated with St. Alban, we have an explanation of the application of the title "Protomartyr Anglorum" to the Saint: see the Lives catalogued by Hardy, I, i. 6-12, 14-16, 27, 30. Note also (op. cit. p. 22) the words of a writer who says *confidenter dico nostrum* [*Albanum*] *calumnias Britonum non formidans.* This annexation of St. Alban by the English has puzzled many modern writers.

was Bishop of Poitiers[1] from about 600 to his death in 609. In the course of a long and uninspiring poem in praise of Virginity occurs the following line :—

"Egregium Albanum fecunda Britannia profert."[2]

The context in which this line occurs is significant. It shows that St. Alban is being enumerated along with such famous martyrs as SS. Cyprian, Vincent, and Victor. At the end of the sixth century, therefore, the fame of the "protomartyr of the English" has spread beyond the boundaries of his native island, and he has come to be regarded as a great historic personage, whose exploits are sufficiently remarkable and sufficiently well-attested to place him in the very front rank of latter day saints. It would seem, therefore, that his fame was on the increase. This is confirmed by further investigation. In the Bollandist version of Constantius' late fifth-century "Life of St. Germanus of Auxerre," the visit of the Bishop to Britain in 429 is made to include a pilgrimage to the site of St. Alban's martyrdom.[3] St. Germanus is described as opening the grave of St. Alban, and as depositing therein certain notable relics. At first sight, this looks like good evidence that at a century and a quarter after the death of St. Alban, the site of his passion was marked by a basilica, in which the collection of relics bestowed by St. Germanus could be preserved and revered. But unfortunately, in the one version[4] of the "Life" which is known to be earlier than the end of the sixth century, these incidents are entirely omitted. The evidence then merely goes to show that at the time when the interpolation was made—probably at the beginning of the seventh century—St. Alban was a personage of sufficient consequence to make it worth while to insert an incident connected with him : and that at the same period there was a basilica marking the site of the martyrdom, dating, in popular

[1] Migne, "Patrologiae," 88.

[2] "Carmina," viii. 6, line 155.

[3] "Acta SS. Boll. Jul.," vii. 200.

[4] "MS. Bibl. Nat.," Paris, Nouvelles acquis. Lat. 2178. Cf. Baring Gould, "Life of St. Germanus". Y Cymrodor, 1904.

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estimation at any rate, from St. Germanus' day. It is possible that the dedication of a church by St. Germanus to St. Alban accounts for the association of their names in the mind of the interpolator, whoever he was.

Passing on about a century and a quarter, we come to a well-marked stage in the development of the legend of St. Alban and of his earliest church. In the "Ecclesiastical History," Bede has inserted a long and detailed account of the passion.[1] He is obviously indebted to Gildas; he knows of Fortunatus' verse—which he misquotes—but he has access to a vast deal of fresh material which has accumulated round the name of St. Alban. Two more miracles have found their way into the story; and Bede's reputation for honesty is sufficient to prevent us from imagining that he fabricated either of them. Somehow or other, they have become part of the tale. The stream which dried up before the feet of the saint is now made to gush forth from the hill-top that his thirst may be assuaged. In addition, Divine vengeance overtakes the substitute headsman, whose eyes fall to the ground at the same moment as the head of the martyr. But despite this larger admixture of the miraculous, the whole account is much more convincing than the less artistic story of Gildas. The difference in favour of Bede's version cannot wholly be ascribed to his superior literary skill; for there is present a distinct element of local colour, including an accurate description of a plain and a hill which Bede had almost certainly never seen. Almost certainly, we may say, because he describes the little river, which he does not call the Thames, as *flumen . . . meatu rapidissimo:* a conjunction of words which would hardly have been employed by a man who had seen it with his own eyes. It is, then, natural to suppose that Bede found this local colour ready to hand in his sources. Plainly the legend of St. Alban had increased in dignity since Gildas wrote, even as Bede's description is longer and more detailed than that of his predecessor. At this time, moreover, St. Alban has attained the dignity of a feast-day: his execution

[1] Plummer's edition, I, vii.

is said to have taken place on 22 June, though Bede, with his admirable honesty, will hazard no guess as to the year. He concludes his account by repeating Gildas' statement that a handsome memorial basilica was erected shortly after St. Alban's death; but he adds on his own part the very important information that miraculous cures and other exhibitions of supernatural power took place in that church, and, what is more, were taking place in his time. The points to be noticed are three. First: at the period when Bede wrote, about the year 731, the site of St. Alban's martyrdom was not only well known, but had been famous for a long time. Secondly: there was then in existence a church with some pretensions to elegance which was considered to date back to very early times. Thirdly: in this church miraculous cures had long been wrought, and were still being wrought with great effect. When this latter piece of information is taken in connection with the situation of Verulam on the Roman road, it seems difficult to resist the conclusion that the place was already a pilgrimage centre. Certainly there must have been a priest or priests in charge of the church, to look after the relics, to superintend those who came to make trial of the miraculous virtues of the spot, and to profit by the offerings of the faithful.

We must now turn to the orthodox account, in the thirteenth century form it assumed under the hand of Matthew Paris.[1] It is half a dozen times as long as Bede's version, to which it is obviously indebted for whatever is best in it. It starts by offering circumstantial information about St. Alban's teacher, who is called by the remarkable name of Amphibalus: it describes his life in the home of St. Alban, and his subsequent escape to Wales through the heroism of his convert. Yet another miracle has been introduced: while St. Alban is in prison before his execution, a miraculous drought testifies to the wrath of Nature against the persecutors. The very day —22 June—and the very year—304—of the martyrdom are

[1] "Chronica Majora," Rolls Series, i. 149 *seq.* "Vitæ II Offarum," ed. Wats, 26 *seq.*

given with the utmost confidence. There are elaborate descriptions of the bearing of the saint, of the behaviour of the magistrates and of the spectators. After his death the very atmosphere is full of miracles. The compassionate headsman, when in a moribund condition, is restored to life by contact with the martyr's body. The heavens are full of signs and wonders. Never for one instant is the tone of precision abandoned. Just ten years after the death of St. Alban, in 314, a church is constructed in his honour, and from that time forward miraculous cures were constantly performed for many years. The episode of St. Germanus' visit is duly recorded, but under the year 446. Then comes a remarkable statement, in flat contradiction to what has been said regarding the continuity of miracle-working at the shrine: namely, that the church was destroyed by the Saxons so thoroughly that between 586 and 793 the very memory of it perished. That this was not the case we have already seen: the church was well known and famous in the time of Bede, and it is absurd to suppose that its site can have been forgotten at the date when Offa is alleged to have rediscovered it.

As to the general worthlessness of this account there can be no two opinions. Evidently it consists of a barefaced amplification of older authorities, themselves not above suspicion, with masses of fictitious detail. To place any reliance upon it would be folly. What then can we say of the subsequent matter, the story of the actual foundation of the Abbey? This may be summarized as follows:—

Offa the Great of Mercia, horror-stricken at the blood shed on account of his ambitious designs, resolves to fulfil a vow once taken by his remote ancestor, Offa I [1]—a vow passed on from father to son without discharge. In gratitude for special mercies vouchsafed to him, the first Offa had sworn that one

[1] This personage, perhaps the Uffo of Danish historians, was King of the Continental Angles. He is mentioned in Beowulf, lines 1949, 1957, and in Widsith, lines 35-44. See Chadwick, "Origin of the English Nation," chap. vi. It may be mentioned that the "Vitæ II Offarum" (26) and the "Chronica Majora" (i. 356) are not quite in agreement as to the precise motives which induced Offa II to fulfil the vow.

of his House should found a monastery. In the year 793, accordingly, the second Offa swears to endow a monastery for one hundred monks.[1] In a vision he was warned of the place where the bones of the Blessed Alban had remained concealed for two entire centuries. Thither he journeyed, accompanied by his Bishops Ceolwulf and Unwona. The ground parted asunder before his feet, and the precious relics were disclosed to view. With all reverence they were transferred to the site of the church, which Offa had projected on a sumptuous scale. The King then went to Rome to consult with the Holy Father upon the question of endowments. Remarkable privileges and exemptions were granted to the projected foundation by Pope Adrian I, and Offa was so touched with the favourable reception accorded to his scheme that he bestowed upon the Pontiff and his successors the tribute known as Peter Pence. From this payment, however, he was careful to exempt the new House. Returning homeward, he built the Abbey in splendid style, endowed it lavishly, and bestowed upon it those sweeping exemptions from spiritual and temporal supervision to which his charters of foundation bear witness.

Now this story, which was accepted as it stands by Dugdale, and has passed from him into all accounts of the foundation of the Abbey, breaks down in almost every particular when it is subjected to examination. First of all we will look at the foundation charters,[2] which were triumphantly produced by Paris as evidence of the justice of the pretensions of his House. No exhaustive knowledge of diplomatics[3] is needed to prove that in their present form both muniments are forgeries. The second and supplementary charter is wholly indefensible. It purports to bestow upon the new founda-

[1] It is extremely unlikely that the convent ever reached this figure in præ-Conquest times. The average membership was about fifty: occasionally, when the House was in the height of its fame, this number was slightly increased. See pp. 90, 162, 184 below, and Appendix III.

[2] B.M. Cotton MS. Nero D i. f. 148. The second charter is repeated with various additions on ff. 151, 151*b*. See Appendices I and II.

[3] Earle, "Land Charters," 397. Haddan and Stubbs, iii. 478. Kemble, "Codex Diplomaticus," clxii., clxi.

tion additional estates amounting to thirty "mansiones";[1] and it proceeds, in contradiction to the first, to exempt the House and all its possessions from royal and episcopal authority. Even its parish churches are exempted from the jurisdiction of the ordinary. All fines levied upon the Abbot's people are to go, not to King or to Bishop according to circumstances, but always to the Abbot himself. The alleged grant by Offa is indeed only an excuse for dragging in all the privileges which were most coveted in the thirteenth century, and to which the title of the House was then far from clear. That Offa may have granted out the land here attributed to him is possible, though difficult to prove; but that he could have granted in the eighth century those particular privileges which represented the *summum bonum* of the greatest abbeys in the thirteenth century, is inconceivable.

But the first and main charter cannot be dismissed so summarily, despite the just suspicion with which it was regarded by Kemble. There is some reason for believing that although it is inflated and interpolated almost beyond recognition, it may be at bottom a genuine document. Commencing with an elaborate and high-sounding invocation, it proceeds to bestow upon the Abbey the land of fifty "mansiones,"[2] and to free the grant in perpetuity from all temporal service. Those who dare to infringe the terms of the grant are laid under a sonorous malediction. The House is committed to Willigod the Priest to rule for his life. After his death the brethren are to elect a successor from among their own number, with the counsel of the Bishop who shall be over them. In case there is no fitting person the Bishop himself is to appoint, with the counsel of the brethren. The charter is attested by Offa himself and by ten other kings, among them Alfred. The other witnesses include two archbishops and thirteen bishops.

What is there to be said in favour of this document? In the first place, all these bishops seem to have been alive at the

[1] At Wisham 12; at Shipton 3; at Fenton 10; at "Lygeton" (? Luton) 5.
[2] 34 at Caisho; 6 at "Henamstede" (? Hemel Hempstead); 10 at Stanmore.

time of the grant, 793, although most of them are merely names to us. In the next place, the amount of land bestowed is not excessive under the circumstances; and in this connection there is a further point to be noticed. It is characteristic of the oldest English monasteries that their estates tend to lie in a solid block round about them. In early days, apparently, there was land and to spare at the disposal of an intending royal patron; he could grant contiguous estates almost where he pleased. But as time went on this became more and more difficult, until in post-Conquest times a monastery had to take its land as it could get it, here a manor and there a manor, as the founder could obtain them. In light of this, it is important to notice that the sixty-four "mansiones" granted by Offa lie very compactly round about the neighbourhood of the House. Lastly, the style of the document can hardly be taken as evidence of complete and deliberate fabrication: the pompous and bombastic phraseology does not accord badly with the transitional period of declining taste which preceded the Carolingian Renaissance. But this is all that can be said in favour of the document. The worst things about it are the form in which it is couched, which suggests clumsy forgery; and the remarkable extent of the privileges granted, which is unparalleled in authentic charters of the period. It is impossible not to suspect interpolation, as deliberate, if less daring, than that which has already been noticed in the supplementary charter. Indeed, when it is remembered that the very privileges, here stated to have been granted by a stroke of the pen, were, as a matter of history, secured painfully, one by one in after time, it seems reasonable to conclude that the document was "manufactured" by blending a genuine grant, probably highly unsatisfactory to later taste in its baldness and brevity, with other less reputable elements. The whole mass was probably worked up in accordance with the best antiquarian tradition of the time into something like a comprehensive manifesto of the claims and rights of the House. There is certainly some basis of fact; but this basis is absurdly small in proportion to the imagina-

tive structure which has been reared upon it, and the terms of the original muniment, supposing it to have been in the hands of the fabricators, are lost beyond the possibility of recovery. To sum up, it is plain that as confirmation of the orthodox story of the foundation of the Abbey, the documentary evidence submitted by Paris is worse than useless.

Again, the account of Offa's journey to Rome, and of his relations with Adrian I, seems for the most part to be pure invention. The only element of truth lies in the fact that at this time there was some friendly communication between Rome and Mercia. Soon before 786, Pope Adrian told Charles the Great that he would welcome the envoys which he had heard that Offa was preparing to send to him concerning the projected archbishopric of Lichfield. In the same year[1] the legates George and Theophylact visited England, and did what the King desired. In return for this, apparently, Offa granted to Rome in the next year an annual payment of 365 mancouses[2] for the relief of the poor and for the maintenance of lights in St. Peter's. The good understanding between Offa and Adrian seems to have lasted long: there were indeed rumours at a later date that Offa had become disaffected towards the holy see, but Adrian was probably justified in treating them as unworthy of credence.[3] No trace can be found in the Papal registers of Offa's alleged visit to Rome, far less of any grant of privileges by Adrian to St. Albans. In fact, for the next two centuries there is no mention of the Abbey to be discovered in the records at the Vatican. It seems plain that the St. Albans brethren of the thirteenth century, with a very intelligible desire to make their unique position among English monasteries date from the earliest days, put forward the theory that privileges and exemptions which, in point of fact, had been acquired one by one, were merely a renewal of those which the House had possessed from the earliest years of its existence. In support

[1] Jaffé, "Regesta," i. 301. [2] Haddan and Stubbs, iii. 445, 524.
[3] Jaffé, i. 304.

of this theory they fabricated documentary evidence with much *naïveté* and little compunction.

Are we then to conclude that the foundation of the Abbey by Offa is merely a pious fiction? To do so would be almost as rash as to accept without question the orthodox account. It is highly probable that Offa was in some way connected with the early history of the Abbey: certainly that was the tradition held by early twelfth-century historians like William of Malmesbury[1] and Henry of Huntingdon,[2] who had no motives for exaggerating the antiquity of a House which was already making itself disliked by the extent of its claims. The facts for which any acceptable hypothesis must account seem to be as follows: first, the existence of a famous church containing miracle-working relics of St. Alban at a time previous to Offa's alleged discovery: secondly, the tradition connecting that King with the early history of a monastery at St. Albans: and thirdly, the absence of all mention of his action in contemporary sources.

It is clear, to begin with, that if Offa did found an abbey at the place later known as St. Albans, the deed was accompanied with no such flourish of trumpets as the historians of the House would lead us to suppose. And it is noteworthy that neither Malmesbury nor Huntingdon makes any mention of a journey to Rome on the part of the founder, nor yet of the acquisition of remarkable privileges: they agree in stating that Offa translated the relics of St. Alban from the ground in which they lay to a shrine worthy of their sanctity, which was enclosed in a church of some elegance. They also say that the King gathered together a band of monks to serve the church. It may therefore be surmised that what Offa really accomplished was the exhumation of the miracle-working relics, their enclosure in a shrine, and the improvement of the church surrounding them. In addition, it would seem that he substituted regulars under the rule of St. Benedict for any persons who had hitherto acted as custodians of the spot.

[1] "De gestis regum Angliae," Book I; "De gestis Pontificum Anglorum," IV.
[2] "Historia," p. 124, R.S.

This last step would naturally be accompanied by the erection of conventual buildings[1] and the endowment of the new community—very probably on the modest scale suggested by the charters we have examined. If this be a true account, Offa's action would have been so unimportant, and productive of changes so trifling, that we can well understand that silence of contemporary sources concerning the "foundation" of the Abbey—a silence which remains so mysterious if the orthodox account be accepted. Further, there is another consideration to be urged against the view that Offa founded the Abbey upon a magnificent scale. When the first Norman abbot, Paul of Caen, came to take charge of the House, he found it necessary, cautious and level-headed though he was, to rebuild the whole edifice upon a vastly larger scale. Not only did he shower scorn upon his predecessors as "rudes et idiotas,"[2] but he refused to transport to his new fabric the alleged remains of Offa himself.[3] This seems to indicate that at the time of the Norman Conquest, the Mercian king was not regarded as having placed the House under any overwhelming debt of gratitude. But it will not do to neglect the strong tradition connecting his name with the Abbey: and it is noteworthy that the feast of the Translation of St. Alban (the morrow of St. Peter ad Vincula) was believed to have made its appearance before the Conquest. This is perhaps an additional reason for giving credit to the belief current among impartial twelfth-century historians, that at the end of the eighth century something happened which connected King Offa with St. Alban and his church.

To sum up the results of this investigation. It seems on the whole probable that the "foundation" of the Abbey at the close of the eighth century consisted merely in the rehousing of St. Alban's bones, in the improvement of the church already existing, and in the installation of regular clergy, probably to the exclusion of seculars already on the spot. The new community was endowed with modest possessions.

[1] "Gesta Abbatum Mon. S. Albani," R.S., i. 8. [2] "Gesta," i. 62.

[3] "Gesta," i. 62. But cf. *ibid.* 7, where it is stated that the bones of Offa were lost.

CHAPTER II.

THE SAXON ABBOTS.

In the course of the preceding chapter the orthodox account of the foundation of the Abbey was compared and contrasted with such fragments of information as could be gleaned from the materials at our disposal. In this manner the discrepancies of the legendary account were discovered and to some extent supplemented. As the investigation proceeded it became increasingly evident that little reliance was to be placed upon the unsupported word either of Paris himself or of the earlier historiographers from whom he derived his information. But for the history of the early years of the new monastery, we are wholly at his mercy. His account is the only guide that we possess. Either because the Abbey was so small and so obscure that its fortunes attracted no attention from the world without: or because the names under which these early abbots pass are due to the fertility of later invention, it is impossible to compare the tradition of the House with any less prejudiced source of information. The story told by Paris must be assumed to possess a basis of solid fact, or it must be rejected in its entirety. In favour of the former course, two considerations may be urged. First, these early abbots are treated in fashion so summary as to make it improbable that Paris has "edited" their annals to any considerable degree. Secondly, there is a persistent strain of secularity and disorder running through the story of their doings which bears upon it the stamp of truth. Some of the incidents which will be noticed —the poisoning of Wulsig, the recurrent scandals connected with the neighbouring house of nuns—are hardly such as would be selected by a loyal monk writing of the infancy of

his house, if he had felt himself free to draw upon his imagination without any reference to historical facts. It is on the whole, then, probable that the traditional account of the early days of the Abbey contains a real basis of fact; although it may well be maintained that the names of the first half-dozen Fathers were invented to satisfy the demands of a later age.

As to the first Abbot "Willigod," tradition is singularly jejune and unsatisfying. Of his antecedents we know nothing, save that he was a friend of the founder. As to the composition, or even as to the numbers, of the Convent over which he ruled, hardly any information has survived. There seems to have been a notion that its members were selected for their sanctity and reputation out of many lands, but whether this is a piece of genuine tradition, or the outcome of a patriotic desire to represent the early brethren of St. Albans as the salt of the earth, may be open to question.[1] It is, however, certain that the general condition of monastic discipline in England of the eighth century was far from satisfactory. Bede, in his well-known letter to Archbishop Egbert of York, laments the frequence of scandals in connection with the foundation of new Houses, some of which were homes of vice and disorder of every kind, whose inmates desired merely to escape from the burdens which the State imposed upon laymen.[2] There is therefore nothing improbable in the story that Offa judged it well to import monks from the Continent to raise the standard of life among the laxer English regulars. In support of this hypothesis, it may be pointed out that there are traces of schism and disunion among the brethren of St. Albans during the first few years of their corporate existence, such as would be caused by the opposition between a "Secular" and an "Austere" party.

Abbot "Willigod" is said to have ruled his flock "strenu-

[1] As an illustration of the historical methods of Newcome, it may be mentioned that he supplements the statement of the "Gesta" with the astonishing information that most of the brethren came from the Abbey of Bec in Normandy, regardless of the fact that neither the Duchy nor the Abbey were at this time in existence. Cf. Clutterbuck, "Hist. Herts.," vol. i.

[2] Bede, ed. Plummer, i. 414-16.

ously," but further particulars as to his rule are lacking. Apparently he survived his friend Offa by a few months only, dying, like him, in 796. The death of the Abbot is variously ascribed to grief at the loss of the King, and to Divine punishment for having neglected to secure the King's bones for suitable interment. This is another illustration of the hopelessly inconsistent character of the materials for the early history of the Abbey. Whether "Willigod" did or did not secure the bones, they seem to have come into the possession of the House in some way or other. At the time of the Conquest, they were believed to lie in the little church pulled down by Paul of Caen.[1]

The next abbot was a member of the Convent, called "Eadric" by tradition. Like his predecessor, he was related to the Mercian royal House, and was in addition a prime favourite with King Ecgfrid. This was fortunate. To judge from the vague statements of the "Gesta," the rule of the new abbot was eventful. There were troubles of various kinds both within and without the community: the former doubtless arising from insubordination on the part of the laxer brethren, and the latter from the attempts of certain persons to despoil the House of the modest possessions conferred upon it by Offa. Abbot "Eadric," however, exerted himself "strenuously," and with the help of his friend the King, he weathered the storm, and overcame his enemies foreign and domestic. His reign was also short, but we are not given any information as to the date of his death. His successor was one "Wulsig," concerning whom the author of the "Gesta" becomes suddenly eloquent, furnishing information which, from its curious character, seems to be based upon genuine tradition. In "Wulsig" the secular party in the convent would seem to have been represented. Although a man of antecedents as distinguished as either of his predecessors, he showed himself to be of an entirely different stamp. He discarded the monastic habit, and displayed himself resplendent in silken gear. He hunted too much, he prayed too little;

[1] See below, p. 39.

and all his energies were directed rather to propitiating secular princes than to serving the King of Heaven. Worse still, he showed an undue partiality for feminine society; he entertained ladies openly within his lodgings, and even went so far as to establish a nunnery of questionable reputation scandalously close to the dwelling of the convent.[1] Such cloaking of vice under the name of religion produced the worst results upon the reputation alike of Abbot and Abbey. "The spark of charity died out, the devotion of many grew cold." Nor was this all. The Abbot was not content to live the life of a secular noble: he had not even the decency to husband the resources of his house. He alienated the precious ornaments of the shrine, and distributed the possessions of the community among a horde of greedy relatives. By such conduct he seems to have driven the stricter party in the convent to desperation. A rising took place against his authority. Whether his excesses had alienated even the laxer brethren, it is impossible to say: but something like an open warfare arose between abbot and monks. So bitter grew the hatred that "Wulsig" was poisoned—such at any rate was the general belief—and died miserably amid the execrations of the convent that he had ruled so ill. After his death, the stricter party among the brethren succeeded in bringing pressure to bear upon those who had been enriched at the expense of the House, and the majority of the endowments were recovered and reapplied to their original purpose.

This unpleasant story is all the more convincing because, as we know from Asser,[2] monachism in England had fallen upon very evil days in the course of the century immediately preceding the reign of Alfred. Indeed, when that king was engaged upon his fruitless attempt to reform the English monasteries he found himself obliged to import from abroad the convent of his model houses. And though it is impossible to fix with any certainty the limits of the rule of "Wulsig,"

[1] "Gesta," i. 11.

[2] Asser, cc. 93, 96. See also the letter of Fulc of Rheims to Alfred, "Cart. Saxon," ii. 90. Stevenson's "Asser," 332.

yet it is natural to suppose that he flourished near the middle of the ninth century. It would therefore appear that the marginal note REX ALFREDUS MAGNUS which appears opposite the account of his rule in Cotton MSS. Nero D i. and Claudius E IV is approximately correct.[1]

After the death or murder of "Wulsig," the respectable party in the convent seems to have regained the upper hand. There was even some attempt at reform—perhaps to be associated with the efforts made by King Alfred in the same direction. It is, however, typical of the obscurity of the House at the time that no mention of its condition or of its reformation can be discovered in contemporary writers. That there was a deliberate attempt at reformation from within can hardly be doubted. The next abbot, "Wulnoth," seconded if not inspired by the party of reform within the convent, spent his first few years in correcting the abuses to which the errors of his predecessor had given rise. The lands which had been alienated so rashly were recovered, and the "semi-secular" nuns whose presence had given rise to so many disorders, were placed under strict discipline. Their liberty was restricted, they were compelled to observe the provisions of the Benedictine Rule, to attend Canonical hours in the "greater" church,[2] and to take up their abode in the Almonry.

Unfortunately, Abbot "Wulnoth's" model behaviour lasted only for a few years. Seemingly, at St. Albans as elsewhere, the attempted reformation of English monachism during the reign of Alfred did not survive its inspirer. The Abbot abandoned his former discreet mode of living, and went so far as to change both the shape and colour of the cowl and frock worn at his House, apparently in the direction of a closer resemblance to the ordinary costume of a layman.[3]

[1] Birch, "Fasti Monastici," and Searle, "Onomasticon," place him *circ.* 875. But both works copy Dugdale, who guesses flagrantly.

[2] This phrase seems to imply that there were two churches: what then was the "lesser" church? Perhaps the nuns had hitherto attended Divine Service in a small chapel of their own, at some distance from the main conventual church.

[3] Cf. Pope John VIII's severe letter to the English clergy (Jaffé, i. 382) adjuring them to lay aside secular garb and revert to the habit of their profession.

Going from bad to worse, he, like Chaucer's monk five centuries later,

> Yaf nat of that text a pulled hen
> That seith, that hunters been nat holy men.

He purchased falcons and greyhounds, and finding that his habit, even in its modified form, hampered him, he followed the evil example set him by many of his brother prelates, and discarded it altogether. In fine, without open scandal, the Abbey was on the point of reverting to the condition in which the last abbot had left it, when its inmates received a shock that aroused them from their lethargy.

Thus far, it seems, the House had escaped the attentions of the Northmen. Placed at some distance from the nearest navigable river, it lay rather outside the track of the ordinary plundering bands. And yet its situation on the London road must prevent us from attributing its long immunity to mere remoteness. In all probability it escaped the early raids because it was not worth plundering: there was no town close by save the long deserted ruins of Verulamium, and the House itself presented none of the attractions which might have called forth a raid specially designed for its benefit. Plainly, despite the protests of later writers, the Abbey of St. Albans was in the ninth century but a poor little place, owing whatever small reputation it possessed rather to the sanctity of its relics than to the splendour of its buildings or to the prosperity of its community. And, as we have seen, the recent disorders had caused the zeal of the faithful to grow cold, so that the repute of St. Alban was small in the land.[1] In this manner it is possible to explain the safety of the House during the early period of the Viking invasion. Some time before the middle of the tenth century, however, the peace which enfolded the isolated little community was rudely shattered. A wandering band of Danes swooped upon the Abbey,[2] broke

[1] "Gesta," i. 10.

[2] Dugdale assigns the raid to the year 930, but gives no authority. The date is probably a guess, based upon his estimate of the lengths of the reigns of preceding abbots; and as a matter of fact there does not seem to have been any

open the shrine in which Offa had placed the relics of St. Alban, and bore them off across the sea. Strangely enough, there is no tradition of murder or arson. Perhaps the brethren received timely warning and fled. Whether much material damage was suffered it is impossible to say: for grief at the loss of the relics outweighed all other considerations in the eyes of those who in later times narrated the incident.

The circumstances are somewhat mystifying: why should a marauding party of Danes carry away overseas the bones of an English saint, instead of casting them into the nearest river? At first sight, one is almost tempted to suppose that the whole story was invented to account for the destruction or loss of the precious relics. But strange as is the incident, the sequel is yet more remarkable. It is said that the relics were carried off with all reverence by the robbers, and deposited in the Benedictine Abbey of Odensee, where their sanctity was fully appreciated. The community of St. Albans were, it is said, inconsolable, but taking such a visitation to be the retribution of their own shortcomings, they resolutely adopted a more decorous method of life. The sacrist Egwin, however, was determined to recover the relics; and we are assured that he went to Odensee, entered the monastery there, and at length succeeded in forwarding the bones to the Abbot of St. Albans. Then, before the theft was discovered, he pleaded nostalgia, and returned to his own house.

The whole story looks as if it could be dismissed as a transparent fabrication. Matthew Paris confesses that he had never heard of it. But he gives the names of those who assured him that the story was current in Denmark, and very substantial names they are. Master Odo, Treasurer to King Waldemar,[1] Master Nicholas, Treasurer of Denmark, afterwards Treasurer to Henry III of England, as well as a certain

movement among the Danes in that particular year. But the date, though a little later than might have been expected from the apparent course of the chronology of the "Gesta," cannot be many years wrong.

[1] Apparently Waldemar II (1202-41).

Edward the Clerk, Privy Councillor to the same sovereign, do not seem to have been the persons to have allowed their names to be appended to a fiction, however laudable. And still more curious is the fact that even to-day the market-place of the little Danish town bears the name of St. Alban, and quite close at hand there is a church dedicated to him. It is, of course, possible that the story is nothing but a scrap of local Odensee folklore, invented to explain a couple of unusual dedications. There is nothing intrinsically impossible, however, in the story; and if it be true, it constitutes a rather remarkable illustration of tenth-century monastic manners.

Whether on account of the recovery of the bones, or for some other reason which it is now impossible to conjecture, the end of the abbacy of "Wulnoth" was marked by a fresh outburst of enthusiasm on behalf of St. Alban. Many sick persons were, we are assured, healed by virtue of the relics, and the House once more began to grow in reputation.[1] In the midst of this time of promise, the Abbot, who had atoned for the wildness of his youth by the sanctity of his declining years, fell mortally ill and shortly died. He was succeeded by one "Eadfrith," who, like all the early abbots, is said to have been of royal blood. Although not positively vicious, the new abbot was far from maintaining the high standard of life which had characterized the last years of his predecessor. He is declared to have been guilty of sloth, weakness, and incompetence. With a head of this kind, it is hardly likely that the condition of the convent was very satisfactory. Probably the unsatisfactory condition of the discipline was emphasized by an example of eminent piety existing in the immediate neighbourhood. About this time, the story goes, a cell was constructed upon the spot which St. Germanus was said to have occupied when he paid his alleged visit to the shrine of St. Alban. The occupant of the cell was a Dane named Wulf, who, after long living the eremitical life in all devotion, expired at length in the odour of sanctity. Curiously enough, he was the unconscious cause of much misery to the

[1] "Gesta," i. 18.

House. The spectacle of his holy life and edifying death affected the unstable Abbot so powerfully that he determined to resign his pastoral cure and retire to the vacant cell. The unexpected step seems to have taken the convent entirely unawares, and to have paralysed their energies. They found themselves utterly unable to agree upon the choice of a successor. Two clearly divided parties were formed within the convent: on the one side was the prior, a man of great sanctity, with his personal following: on the other, the majority of the brethren. Perhaps once more it was a deep-seated question of policy: Prior Ulfo and the minority probably represented a stricter and more ascetic standard of life than that which commended itself to the society at large. However this might be, the dilemma was sufficiently serious. According to the letter of the Benedictine rule, such elections were to be made by the "major et sanior pars conventus". But no provision was made for cases like the present, where one party believed itself to be *sanior*, and another knew itself to be *major*. For an entire year, it seems, no compromise was arrived at, and the House remained without a head. At last, as had been contemplated in the "charter of Offa," an appeal was made to higher authority, in the shape of the neighbouring bishop, presumably the Bishop of Dorchester. That the House already possessed considerable freedom from episcopal interference is shown—if tradition can be trusted upon a rather delicate point—by the fact that when intervention did come, it merely took the form of a reconciliation of the two parties in the convent. In consequence of the restoration of harmony, an abbot called "Wulsin" was chosen. Concerning his term of rule, some important information has been preserved by tradition.

It would appear that as the Abbey waxed prosperous, a little village had grown up just beyond its precincts, on the crest of the hill overlooking the river. Being yet insignificant, the new settlement suffered severely by its proximity to the royal borough of Kingsbury. According to the Abbey story, the villagers were oppressed by the burghers, over whom the

Abbot had no control.[1] Being desirous of safeguarding the vill which looked to his House for prosperity and protection, Abbot "Wulsin" determined upon vigorous action. Since he could not weaken the borough, he would strengthen the vill. To this end he established a market therein: he assisted with money and materials those who desired to settle in the place: he built three churches to guard the three gates of the town.[2] His efforts, however, do not seem to have met with the success for which he looked. After his death,[3] his successor, Alfric by name, was compelled to resort to more drastic measures. He purchased from King Edgar the great royal fishpool from which the burgesses of Kingsbury derived their principal means of subsistence. Pleading that it was too close to the Abbey, and was injuring the health of the convent,[4] he proceeded to drain all but a small portion of it, reserving the remainder as a stew for the use of the House. As he had doubtless anticipated, the burgesses found themselves seriously embarrassed. There cannot have been room for two towns in the immediate neighbourhood, and as the Abbey town began to thrive through the astuteness of successive abbots, the royal borough began to decline. Perhaps there was a migration from Kingsbury to St. Albans; at all events the population of the latter place must have rapidly increased about this time, for from its surplus inhabitants it contrived to fill the adjacent ruins of Verulamium with riff-raff of every description, until there grew up something like a thieves'

[1] This statement illustrates the ease with which the claims of St. Albans writers concerning the immemorial existence of the "Liberty of St. Alban" can be confuted out of their own mouth.

[2] This looks as if the Abbot built a wall round the town, in addition to his other effort on its behalf; for it is hard to believe that he found it safeguarded in view of what we are told of its depressed condition. The churches are those of St. Peter in the north quarter, St. Stephen in the east, and St. Michael in the west. The Abbey itself lay to the south.

[3] Dugdale, followed by Birch and Searle, assigns it to 969. He gives no authority, and is probably making a shrewd guess. But as in the case of the Danish raid, above, p. 22, the date cannot be very far wrong.

[4] The memory of this pool is preserved in the modern "Fishpool Street" in the town of St. Albans.

quarter on the other side of the river. The inmates of this disreputable suburb were such undesirable neighbours that in a short time it became necessary to take action against them. Abbot "Alfric" did nothing to remedy the nuisance: perhaps death anticipated him. But his successor "Ealdred" ejected the occupants of the ruins, and prevented a recurrence of the trouble by filling up the underground passages and cellars which had afforded them shelter. He further proceeded to demolish in large measure the Roman structures still standing above ground, and to set aside the material. Apparently the convent was beginning to find the existing accommodation inadequate: for the Abbot seems to have thought that extensive structural alterations would have to be undertaken in the near future. He was not destined to carry out his plans. Like his predecessor, his period of rule was short, and death surprised him before he could turn to account the Roman bricks and stone which he had collected. His successor, "Eadmar," followed his example in quarrying into the ruins of Verulamium, but declined to embark upon any building operations. This fact may be taken either as an illustration of Saxon indolence, or as evidence that the convent had not yet so far outgrown the existing accommodation as to make imperative immediate extensions of the fabric. Of Abbot "Eadmar" nothing at all is known, and he remains a mere name to us. Doubtless on account of this, Paris was at pains to insert among the events of his abbacy a long and fictitious story of the "finding" of the original "Life of St. Alban," alleged to have been written by contemporaries of the martyr. Of this clumsy forgery, ascribed to William of St. Albans, some account will be found in other parts of this book.[1]

"Eadmar" is the last of the abbots whose names we know only from the pages of the "Gesta". For all the others we have some scrap of confirmatory evidence, even if it be only a sadly garbled charter. But, unfortunately, at this very point the Abbey tradition related by Paris falls into grievous confusion. Whether the confusion is the fault of the narrator, or

[1] See above, p. 9, and below, p. 77.

was inherent in the materials from which he derived his information, it is at this distance impossible to discover. In the later tenth century there lived, it seems, two distinguished brothers, Leofric and Aelfric, both connected with the Abbey. Now in one passage of the "Gesta" it is stated that Leofric, Abbot of St. Albans, was elected Archbishop of Canterbury: in another, that Aelfric was Abbot, and that on his elevation to the primacy, he was succeeded by his brother Leofric. Now it is certain that there was never an Archbishop of Canterbury named Leofric. What really happened seems to have been as follows. On the death of "Eadmar," there succeeded him as abbot the distinguished scholar Aelfric, perhaps the Aelfric who had been a monk at the monastery of Abingdon.[1] He was a man of considerable literary attainments, and he soon became known beyond the restricted sphere of his House. About 990 he was raised to the episcopate, his see being Ramsbury. Some five years later he became Archbishop of Canterbury, and lived to enjoy his new dignity until 1005. His successor in the abbacy was his brother Leofric, who, according to one story, might have been primate himself had he so desired.[2] The accuracy of the view here adopted seems to be borne out by certain charters which Paris has copied into his commonplace book, Cotton MS. Nero D i. In one of these charters which purports to be of the year 996, an Abbot named Leofric[3] witnesses a grant to St. Albans. In another, the grantor,[4] King Aethelred II, makes mention of "Aelfricus mihi fidelis archiepiscopus et Leofricus Abbas frater ejus". It is only fair to say that neither of these charters is preserved in anything approaching its original form. Both show obvious signs of thirteenth-century editing. None the

[1] "Memorials of Abingdon," R.S., i. 415.

[2] In singular contrast to the confusion of the text is the clear marginal note on fol. 32 of Nero D i.: "Leofricus electus in archiepiscopum non consensit, asserens fratrem suum Alfricum fuisse multo digniorem. Alfricus igitur effectus est archiepiscopus cantuariensis." Cf. Madden's Preface to Paris, "Hist. Anglorum," pp. ix, x.

[3] Fol. 148*b*. [4] Fol. 149*b*.

less, in the points mentioned it is hard to see any reason for distrusting their evidence.

The rule of Abbot Leofric was extremely long—as long as the combined terms of office of his five immediate predecessors. Indeed, were it not for the evidence of the charters, which is perfectly clear, we should almost be inclined to think that an abbot had been "lost," and that Leofric had been credited with an additional term of years by an oversight. He survived his distinguished brother by many years, and even seems to have lived to witness the restoration of the "right line of Cerdic" to the throne in the person of the Confessor. How the Abbey fared during Leofric's half-century of rule we are told in no very satisfactory fashion. He is said to have governed the House with rare prudence and skill: doubtless there was great need of both qualities in those troubled times. His success was seemingly considerable. St. Alban must have been in high favour with mankind, for the property vested in his House began to increase by leaps and bounds. Of this there is abundant evidence in a number of charters which seem in origin to belong to the period of Leofric's rule, although they have been grievously mutilated by later handling. And as the property of the House increased, so naturally did the prestige of the community which enjoyed the enlarging revenue. It was doubtless on account of this prosperity that the Abbot was encouraged to continue with vigour the operations undertaken by his predecessors against the inhabitants of the borough of Kingsbury. As has already been suggested, the steady hostility of successive abbots cannot but have caused the place to dwindle in importance, and Leofric actually found it practicable to purchase the diminished borough from King Aethelred. The inhabitants were expelled and the buildings razed to the ground. One thing only marred the triumph of the Abbot. Aethelred would not allow him to destroy the small fortification or borough from which the place derived its name. Occupied by royal officials, this stronghold long remained a thorn in the side of the Abbots of St. Albans: a tacit reminder that they were not yet masters of the country round about

their walls. Not until the time of King Stephen did the castle pass at length into the hands of the Abbey authorities.[1]

The purchase of the obnoxious borough of Kingsbury was not the only triumph which made Leofric's rule an important period in the growth of the privileged exemption of the House. Later tradition—though not to be trusted too implicitly upon such a point—associated this time with a growing independence of episcopal control; and the general laxity which crept into the Church in England during the half-century preceding the Conquest, lends some appearance of truth to the belief that the Abbey was largely a law unto itself.

One curious incident has been recorded which is not without interest as illustrating the "sharp practice" of which religious Houses were sometimes guilty in their dealings with one another. The alarm of the Danish invasion which was intended to dispute the throne of England with the Confessor filled the Abbot with fear lest the relics of St. Alban should once again fall into the hands of the Danes. Accordingly, he made a great display of sending the sacred bones to Ely for safe custody. In reality, however, the prudent Leofric had merely dispatched a worthless set of bones in order to blind the world to the fact that he had disposed of the sacred relics in a safe place at home. When the alarm had passed away, he demanded the return of the precious property. But the "mendacious monks of Ely" sent back, not the bones which had been entrusted to them, but another set which they had substituted therefor. The Abbot perceived the fraud: but to avoid scandal accepted the spurious bones with profuse thanks for their safe custody. He then proceeded to unearth the genuine relics, and to place them with much pomp and circumstance in a more prominent position than ever in the midst of the church. The monks of Ely, not realizing the possibility that their fraud had missed its mark, persisted in asserting that they and they alone possessed the genuine relics of St. Alban. Thus was laid the foundation of one of the *causes célèbres* of mediæval monastic litigation; the dispute,

[1] See below, p. 67.

indeed, was not brought to an end until, a century later, pressure from Pope Adrian IV compelled the monks of Ely to confess that they had fallen into the trap which they had themselves laid for the Abbot of St. Albans.

Leofric must have terminated his long period of office at some time between 1042 and 1050, for after the latter date his name no longer occurs in the mutilated charters preserved in Cotton MS. Nero D i. His successor was a certain Leofstan, who bore the remarkable surname of Plumstone: a man in high favour with the Confessor. Under the rule of the new abbot the House continued to enjoy a worldly prosperity, which was doubtless due in some measure to royal patronage, but which was mainly caused, as it seems, by the growing repute of St. Alban. Evidently the number of pilgrims who made their way along the great road to the shrine of the martyr was on the increase: for the Abbot bestirred himself to take novel measures for their protection. In the belt of thick woods which then stretched from the Chilterns to London lurked many wolves, and, more dangerous still, bandits and outlawed men. Leofstan caused the thickets on either side of the road to be cut down, that wayfarers might be better protected against a surprise attack, and he repaired the bridges, so that transit became more secure for man and beast. But more than all this, he enfeoffed three stout Saxon thanes with the manor of Flamstead, that they might keep the woods free of robbers. That was to be the service they rendered for their holding; and they were bound to make good any damage which might be suffered by travellers through their default. In time of disturbance, moreover, they were to constitute themselves the guardians of the Abbey and of its inmates.[1]

That Abbot Leofstan took this step reveals him as a man of sufficient perspicuity to foresee the troublous times which were shortly to befall. It also indicates that the House was now possessed of wealth more than sufficient for the needs of the community. During the years that separated its founda-

[1] "Gesta," i. 40.

tion from the Norman Conquest, the House had been increasing steadily in wealth and importance. In a later chapter, an attempt will be made to determine in some detail its economic condition in the eleventh century. Here it is sufficient to say that at the time of the Conquest it was among the most famous, if not among the wealthiest, of English religious Houses. It is not, perhaps, surprising to find that the years just previous to the landing of Duke William were regarded by the monks of St. Albans, as by so many other Englishmen, as a kind of golden age. Not yet had come the Norman rulers with their energy, their high-handed ways, their terrible singleness of purpose. From the storm and stress of later days, men looked back to the "day of King Edward" as to a quiet haven of refuge which they had left behind them for ever, to fare they knew not whither over a storm-tossed sea, under an alien guidance which they did not understand. Doubtless it was this attitude of mind which invested the rule of Leofric and his immediate successor with a species of glamour, as of a period of unexampled prosperity and well-being, although there is no reason to suppose that the Abbey was by any means a model of discipline at the time. But its situation, a day's march from the greatest city of the land, effectually prevented it from being long out of touch with the leading events of the time. Any change which came over the country at large, as the brethren well knew, must find its echo within the walls of the House. And, as we shall see, the period ushered in by the death of the Confessor was to prove as fateful in the history of the Abbey as in the history of England itself.

CHAPTER III.

NORMAN REFORMERS.

ABBOT LEOFSTAN died, as it seems, some time in the year 1064.[1] He was succeeded by a certain Fritheric, one of those elusive personages who seem to flit through the pages of mediæval chroniclers as though they dreaded the scrutiny, and enjoyed the bewilderment, of modern historians. Matthew Paris gives a detailed and circumstantial account of this abbot, and of the prominent part played by him in the history of his time. Fritheric is represented as one of the most prominent figures at the court of the Confessor, a leader of the Saxon party, and a personal friend of Harold Godwinson. After the fatal September day which shattered the hopes of his friends, the courage of the Abbot is said to have been a tower of strength to the English party. This is the story. The Conqueror's treatment of the vanquished leads to a general uprising, of which the leadership is divided between Fritheric himself and Archbishop Ealdred, although Eadgar, Stigand, and Bishops Wulfstan and Walter all take part in it. So formidable are the insurgents, it is said, that William is forced to dissemble with them, and under the dictation of Fritheric, is obliged to confirm the law of King Edward. But when once William has disarmed them by fair words, he proceeds treacherously to crush them individually. Aided by Lanfranc, who appears as a person of mean and spiteful disposition, William grievously oppresses the patriotic party,

[1] "Gesta," i. 44. An ambiguity in the statement of the "Gesta" concerning the length of his successor's reign makes it possible that Leofstan survived until 1065. If that successor figured at the Court of the Confessor as Abbot of St. Albans, as the "Gesta" account implies, it is impossible that Leofstan can have died in 1066, as is elsewhere stated.

so that the leaders are compelled to flee before him. Surprised at his own success, he indulges in some sarcastic comments at the expense of English valour in the presence of Fritheric. The Abbot, with more zeal than discretion, takes up the cudgels on behalf of his countrymen. He blames the unwise generosity of former kings, who have given to the Church lands which might have served for the maintenance of warriors. William, judging the Abbot out of his own mouth, confiscates a large portion of St. Alban's patrimony. Fritheric, fearing for his life, flees to Ely and dies there—a circumstance of which the "mendacious monks of Ely" take full advantage, asserting that he had carried with him, and had deposited with them, the bones of St. Alban. As a result of this, popular reverence for St. Alban begins to decline, and fewer miracles are worked at his tomb. Further, the King and his minions inflict grievous hardships upon the Abbey, felling the timber on the estates and depreciating the property.

Such is the story of Paris. It is hardly necessary to point out the numerous particulars in which it is inconsistent alike with history and with chronology. But as it is the only detailed source of information concerning the doings of the Abbot, it must be carefully examined. The part played by Fritheric in extorting the law of King Edward from the Conqueror looks, as Freeman [1] has observed, like an echo of the Berkhamstead submission of 1066; but unfortunately for Paris' repute as an historian, the incident happens after the general revolt. Nor are the ordinary sources for the history of the period of much assistance in throwing light upon the errors of the traditional account. All that can be conclusively established is that at the time of the Conquest the Abbot of St. Albans was named Fritheric. He witnessed in 1072 the settlement of the great dispute between York and Canterbury.[2] In 1075, also, he appears among the witnesses of the decree of the Council of London.[3] Some time between 1075 and 28 June, 1077, he

[1] "Norman Conquest," iv. 398, and Appendix NN.
[2] "William of Malmesbury," R.S., 298. Freeman, loc. cit.
[3] "Concilia," i. 363.

had died, or had been deposed, for on that date there was a vacancy, which was filled by the first Norman abbot, Paul of Caen. We are thus driven back to the story told by Paris. From the medley of inconsistent detail, it seems possible to draw certain conclusions. In the first place, the tradition representing Fritheric as one of the Conqueror's opponents may have some foundation. The Abbot was connected in some way or other with Stigand; for certain properties belonging to the House were found in the possession of that unhappy prelate. But apart from any such connection, a Saxon abbot was not likely to have found life easy with Norman rule so close to his gates. His proximity to London must have brought him into contact with many energetic ecclesiastics, whose fingers itched to reform the great House whose administration, doubtless, left so much to be desired. Since Fritheric retained his position until 1075 at earliest, it is reasonable to suppose that he can have committed no overt act of opposition to William before that date. Is it possible that Fritheric was implicated in the rebellion of 1075, and that his complicity was punished by deprivation? Such an hypothesis would at once explain his disappearance and account for the revolutionary character of the movement with which he is connected in the story. Moreover, as we shall notice in another place, there was a remarkable displacement of Englishmen by Frenchmen on the estates of the House, so that at the time of the Survey there were only two Englishmen[1] to twenty-four Frenchmen among the free tenants. This seems to point to some violent break in the continuity of succession among the free tenants of the House, such as would be caused if Fritheric's dependants became involved in the intrigues of their superior. This may perhaps constitute an additional reason for giving credit to the revolutionary tendencies of Fritheric's character in the story told by Paris. But, in the next place, there seems to be a definite tradition that the House suffered rather harsh treatment at the Conqueror's hands, and, as will be seen later,

[1] Excluding the burgesses of St. Albans. See below, p. 53, and Appendix IV.

this tradition is hardly borne out by sober history. That some of its possessions were seized by Norman nobles is undeniable,[1] but the loss was not very serious and almost all the property was ultimately restored. In no other way does the Abbey seem to have suffered,[2] and yet tradition persists in regarding William and Lanfranc as a pair of arrant oppressors. It is difficult not to associate with this tradition first, the complaints that in those days the zeal of the faithful was growing cold,[3] and secondly, the difficulties [4] encountered by Abbot Paul of Caen in carrying out certain much needed reforms, and thirdly, the diminished reputation of the House in the eyes of contemporaries.[5] Plainly St. Albans was in a most unsatisfactory condition; and the easiest explanation of these unfounded stories of oppression is to suppose that they represent an *ex post facto* attempt to explain a certain degradation into which the House had fallen as a result of its own imprudence or slothfulness. For the attack upon Lanfranc a further motive may be suggested. The authority he exercised over the House was, as we shall see, very considerable; and this of itself would be sufficient to get him disliked by thirteenth-century writers sensitive on the question of exemption. Not until the end of the fourteenth century, when episcopal interference was no longer dreaded, were the St. Albans people willing to acknowledge the debt they owed to the Norman Archbishop.[6] That the explanation here suggested of the attitude of the St. Albans writers towards the Norman authorities of Church and State is plausible, seems to be shown by the history of the rule of Paul of Caen. His appointment is everywhere spoken of as the personal act of

[1] "Gesta," i. 53.

[2] Even the manor of Flamstead, which was taken away from the Saxon thanes who held it of the Abbey, was not lost to the House, for the new Norman tenants performed the same service so piously and so efficiently that St. Alban rather gained than lost by the change.

[3] "Gesta," i. 42, 51.

[4] *Ibid.* 52.

[5] Eadmer, "Historia Novella," R.S., 15. "Gesta," i. 52.

[6] "Liber de Benefactoribus," MS. C.C.C.C., No. vii. Printed as Appendix to Trokelowe's "Chronica," R.S., p. 141.

the primate; and no lengthy argument is required to show that the convent, if left to themselves, would never have chosen a Norman for their superior. The gossip of the time asserted that the new abbot was the son of Lanfranc; but whether this was merely malicious invention or not, the Abbey at least had no reason to regret the intimacy between them. The heart and the purse of Lanfranc were ever at the call of the Abbot. At first, doubtless, he had need of all the support he could command. When he took up his duties on 28 June, 1077,[1] he must have found that his position was anything but a sinecure. With a convent inert or hostile, with conventual buildings dilapidated and incommodious, he was confronted by the task of restoring order to a rule relaxed beyond the bounds of decorum. His first act was to introduce and enforce the revised regulations drawn up by Lanfranc, which represented the embodiment of the best tradition of Norman monachism. The behaviour of the brethren was minutely regulated; their habit changed for one more becoming to their profession; and a restraint was placed upon the indulgence which had allowed to the sick and minuti an immoderate enjoyment of flesh diet. For the better performance of Divine service, it was ordered that a lantern should be carried round the choir at night, so that brethren who had taken advantage of the darkness of the church to doze, or to escape their share of the responses, might be detected and recalled to a sense of their duty. Besides making alterations in the pronunciation of certain words of the liturgy, which had become corrupted, Abbot Paul substituted the new Gallican recension for the ancient English form of chant. Unlike his famous brother abbot, Thurstan of Glastonbury, he found it unnecessary to confront his convent with Norman arrows in order to induce them to revise their method of singing. The substitution of new service books was found to be a sufficient inducement. Paul also restored the rule of silence in church, cloister, and refectory, where of late it had been much neglected. With the thoroughness characteristic of his race, he further proceeded to insist that in

[1] "Gesta," i. 52.

future silence should be observed in dortoir and infirmary, as well as throughout the entire House after Compline.

These reforms were carried out by Paul with rare tact and good sense. He was content to work step by step—"paulatim tamen, ne repentinus impetus seditionem suscitaret, et senum obstinantia discordiam generaret".[1] That he was prepared to use force if necessary appears from the fact that he had a strong jail built for the benefit of the recalcitrant. It is, however, reasonable to suppose that the influence of the Archbishop would be sufficient to reduce to impotence any opposition that may have been aroused. The Archbishop took the keenest interest in the activities of his protégé, and together Lanfranc and Paul formed an irresistible combination. Before very long the House had become a model of discipline and good order, so that the zealous Norman monks who flocked to put themselves under the guidance of the new Abbot began to outnumber the Saxon element in the convent.[2] But Paul was not satisfied with mere perfection of discipline: as befitted a follower of Lanfranc's ideas, he was determined that the House should be renowned as a seat of learning. Accordingly, he instituted the famous Scriptorium of St. Albans, which was in later times to harbour a long succession of historians, whose reputation extended far beyond the walls of the Abbey. He sought out skilful writers, apparently professional penmen, and caused them to labour upon the making of books useful to the House. And it is noteworthy as illustrating the character of the best type of Norman gentleman that in this enterprise the Abbot was assisted by the liberality of a knight named Robert, a learned man and a friend of learning, who presented the Abbey with two-thirds of the tithes of his demesne manor of Hatfield, on condition that the proceeds should be used for the copying of books. This generous aid enabled Paul to keep the penmen constantly at work, making copies of the books which he borrowed from the library of Lanfranc. The Archbishop manifested particular interest in this side of Paul's work, and

[1] "Gesta," i. 69. [2] *Ibid.* 66.

on his own account presented the Abbey with a large number of books.[1] Abbot Paul himself added to the library twenty-eight books. Some of them were certainly liturgical: what the others were we do not know. We are only told that they were all kept together in aumbries set apart for the purpose.

The work of Paul did not stop short at reform of discipline and encouragement of learning. He was profoundly dissatisfied with the condition of the conventual buildings. He condemned his Saxon predecessors, as the "Chronicle" complains, in no measured terms. Doubtless he considered that the contrast between the substantial revenues of the House and the poverty-stricken condition of the fabric justified him in terming former abbots "rudes et idiotas". That the existing structures were small and inconvenient is certain: the later Saxon abbots had long been quarrying among the ruins of Verulam in quest of building material, although very little seems to have been done in the way of actual construction. The only buildings which appeared adequate in the eyes of Abbot Paul were the buttery and the bakehouse—both, presumably, of recent erection. Although he was not the man to embark upon rash or ill-considered undertakings, the Abbot judged it necessary to make a clean sweep of the old buildings, and to reconstruct them throughout. For his material he principally employed the tiles and brickwork which preceding abbots had set aside, but he also made use of the debris of the structures which he pulled down. In the great church, to the construction of which his energies were mainly devoted, traces can yet be seen of the Saxon baluster shafts which came from Offa's chapel. As far as size and proportions are concerned, Paul's new church must have challenged comparison with any structure of the time. Even to-day, despite the efforts of modern restorers, the severe simplicity of the lines he laid down produce a distinctive effect upon the mind of the

[1] In the fourteenth century Lanfranc's gift was said to have consisted of 100 volumes of which 50 were still preserved. "Liber de Benefactoribus," (Trokelowe), p. 441.

observer, reflecting, as it were, the directness and austerity of the original designer. Like all the men of his race, Paul built swiftly—too swiftly for safety, as was amply proved by disastrous experience as well at St. Albans as elsewhere. It is even said that the church, together with the conventual buildings to the south of it, was complete by 1088. It is, however, hardly credible that alterations so extensive can have been brought to a conclusion within the short space of eleven years; and since we know that at the time of Lanfranc's death in 1089[1] there was still building to be done and that it was not until 1115 that the solemn consecration of the Church took place,[2] we should probably be justified in regarding this figure as an underestimate.

It was probably fortunate for Abbot Paul that during the years when his expenditure must have been so heavy, the property of the House was markedly on the increase. The valuable gifts bestowed upon God and St. Alban during these years consisted principally of parcels of land, charges on tithes, and churches with the rights pertaining thereto.[3] It seems probable that at about this time the convent was increasing in numbers; for on some of these new possessions, as Wallingford, Paul founded cells, or dependent priories, inhabited by brethren from St. Albans and ruled by superiors appointed by the Abbot of the Mother House. In this way, doubtless, the overcrowding of the convent was remedied. But it sometimes happened that there was a community of religious already settled upon a place which came into the possession of the Abbey. Such was the case with Belvoir in Lincolnshire, with Binham in Norfolk, and with some property in Hertford. But the most prominent instance was Tynemouth, a large and important priory with great possessions of its own, which was conferred upon St. Albans by Robert Mowbray in 1093. The monks of Durham, who claimed superiority over it themselves,

[1] "Gesta," i. 61. [2] *Ibid.* 71, and below, p. 48.

[3] A detailed list of these acquisitions is to be found in "Gesta," i. 55, 56, 57. In most cases, unfortunately, the values are not given, and the places themselves are too small to be identified in Domesday.

were hugely indignant, but to no purpose.[1] In such a case, doubtless, St. Albans would not benefit much by the acquisition. Cells, however, had their uses. Troublesome brethren could be rusticated until they came to their senses, an overcrowded convent could be thinned out, and, in very exceptional cases, the dependent communities could be compelled to contribute to the expenses of the Abbey. The gathering of such communities round the Mother House sowed the seeds of much future trouble. There was always a doubt as to whether the cells did or did not share in the privileges of the Mother House, and as to the extent of their subjection to the ordinary ecclesiastical authorities. In certain cases, moreover, the founder of the cell reserved certain rights of patronage for himself[2] and for his descendants; and there were perpetual disagreements as to the respective rights of Abbot and patron.[3] In both these directions, the way lay open for much future litigation. At the time when the communities were first brought under the control of the Abbey, however, such considerations must have seemed very remote. The most obvious consequence of the step was a vast accession to the dignity of the House. St. Albans, like a congregation of Cluny in miniature, was able to hold its own General Chapters, at which the priors of the cells were bound to present themselves. These chapters took place every year, usually on the Vigil of St. Alban's Day. In them were discussed and promulgated such new regulations as the Abbot thought fit to introduce: discipline was amended, and defaulters were punished. From time to time an abbot would hold a visitation of his cells, and journey in person from one to the other. With the cells which lay not far from St. Albans this was no great matter; but in regard to Tynemouth circumstances were different. Royal license had usually to be obtained before the Abbot could undertake a journey so tedious. It was customary for him to proceed Northward in great state, accompanied by six

[1] Simeon of Durham, R.S., i. 124. [2] As at Binham and Hatfield Peverel.
[3] See below, pp. 75, 91, 116, 135.

esquires, who held fees from the Abbot on condition that they provided escort on these occasions.[1]

In Paul's day, however, it was at least as necessary to safeguard the original property of the House as to gain for it new possessions. With his usual energy, the Abbot contrived to secure the restitution of certain pieces of property which had been seized by Norman magnates in defiance of the rights of St. Alban. One of his opponents was Odo of Bayeux, whose dealings with the House are far from belying the avarice which is generally considered the key-note of his character. Without a shadow of claim, he had forcibly possessed himself of estates owned by the House in Tewing, Apsbury, and Eywood. Bishop Remigius of Lincoln contented himself with "Cnicumba". Paul was able to secure the restoration of the rights of the Abbey in all four places, although we do not know how he contrived the matter. Probably the influence of Lanfranc was invoked. The Archbishop himself, it is interesting to notice, had come to possess the Abbey manor of Redburn, which had been in Stigand's hands, and had thence passed to his Norman successor. Lanfranc set a good example to others by freely restoring the manor to its original function of defraying the cost of the brethren's clothing. The rights of the Abbey over the restored manor were formally confirmed by William at the Archbishop's request.[2] Perhaps it was at this time, when the House was once more in possession of its full quota of property, that the Conqueror confirmed it in all its "lands, its churches, and its tithes," and ordered his sheriffs to forbear from molesting Abbot and brethren in respect of any lands to which they could show good title.[3]

When Paul had been abbot about twelve years, Lanfranc died. The Primate had been a notable protector of the House, and it must have been largely due to his encourage-

[1] They were first enfeoffed by Abbot Richard of Essay. They fed at his expense, but were bound to provide their own horses and equipment. The whole retinue was entertained at Tynemouth for fifteen days at the charges of the cell. "Gesta," i. 264-5.

[2] Cotton MS. Nero D i, fol. 154. [3] *Ibid.*

ment that so many important reforms were carried to a successful conclusion. He was credited by contemporary opinion with a leading share in the regeneration of the Abbey. Eadmer, chaplain to Lanfranc's successor Anselm, was amazed at the change which a few years had wrought in the condition of the House. His words are worth quoting in the original. After enumerating the good works of the late Archbishop, he says:—

"Quid referam de abbatia S. Albani, quam intus et extra ad nihil fere devolutam ipse ut suam, instituto bonae memoriae Paulo abbate, a fundamento reaedificavit, et intus magna religione, foris multarum rerum donatio, auxit, honoravit, ditavit." [1]

The death of Lanfranc does not seem to have had any adverse effects upon the reforms which he had been instrumental in furthering. The position of the Abbot was probably not quite so strong as it had been in the lifetime of his protector: but Paul was prudent in his generation. He made it his business to be on good terms with William Rufus. A short charter, probably issued soon after the death of Lanfranc, takes St. Albans under the royal protection, and straightly charges the sheriffs of all the counties in which the House held land to beware of defrauding the Abbot of his rights. But if Rufus dealt fairly with Paul,[2] he did not deal fairly with the See of Canterbury, and of this circumstance the Abbot was able to take advantage in the following manner. When after five years' vacancy Anselm was chosen Archbishop, he found himself in serious financial difficulties through the depreciation of his property under royal mismanagement. Abbot Paul, glad to take the opportunity of ingratiating himself with the new Primate, offered pecuniary assistance to tide over the lean years. His offer was gratefully accepted, and Anselm became an enthusiastic friend of the House. He also gave his personal ratification to the new constitutions with which the rule had been supplemented at St. Albans.

[1] "Hist. Nov." loc. cit.

[2] Cotton MS. Nero D i. fol. 154. "Additamenta" to Paris ed., Luard, p. 34.

Despite the greatness of his work for the Abbey, Paul, like many other reformers, was not popular with those who benefited most by his activities. The very violence of the contrast between the old laxity and the new perfection was a cause of stumbling to many. The conservatively-minded among the convent were not at all satisfied with him. They disliked his slighting references to his Saxon predecessors: they complained that in his destruction of the old buildings he had shown himself over-careless in safeguarding the remains of the worthies buried therein. His autocratic attitude, his strict discipline, his singleness of purpose, were resented equally by the weaker brethren. They had some complaints against him that were better grounded. He was no lover of the English, and the monks grumbled that he had lost a fat slice of land through his contemptuous attitude towards a would-be benefactor of Saxon blood.[1] It was not much consolation to reflect that the Abbot of Ramsey had profited by Paul's tactlessness. Still more unfortunate were certain aspects of his management of the estates of the House. He began the dangerous practice of letting out Abbey lands to laymen for a money rent. This was a fruitful source of trouble, because as time went on the tenants would assert that they held in fee, and an expensive law-suit became necessary before estates so granted could be resumed. It is indeed open to question whether any objection was raised at the time: it was easy for abbey historians, writing at a later date, to judge the policy by its consequences. There were one or two instances, however, which were peculiarly exasperating to the convent.[2] The valuable wood of Northaw was handed over to the elder Peter of Valognes, and it was only at great trouble and expense that it was ultimately recovered. Also, the manor of Sarret was given to Robert the Mason, chief of the Abbot's builders. Now, as it happened, Sarret was not Paul's to give; it belonged to the demesne of the convent, over which, as a matter of etiquette, the Abbot had no control. Great was the grumbling that arose, and discontent was no whit assuaged when

[1] "Gesta," i. 62. [2] *Ibid.* 63, 64.

Westwick, another manor similarly situated, was given away in fashion equally arbitrary. Paul pursued his own course without consulting anyone, and the convent had nothing to do but to submit. Despite his arbitrary acts, the merits of Paul were frankly recognized, at any rate by later generations, and the considered verdict of Matthew Paris, no friend of absolutism, was to the effect that the righteous deeds of the first Norman abbot far outweighed his defects.

The great reformer died on 11 November, 1093, after sixteen years of strenuous rule. His death, which took place rather suddenly, was gleefully ascribed by the monks of Durham to Divine retribution for his wickedness in retaining the cell of Tynemouth in their despite.[1] For the moment, his demise spelt disaster to the Abbey. William Rufus, in his usual fashion, was not loath to employ ecclesiastical revenues in meeting the expenses of his splendid court. To the horror of the convent, he would permit no election. For four years he kept the Abbey vacant in his own hands. The property suffered severely, and the usual depreciation began. It was, of course, only the Abbot's estates which remained in royal custody, and the income of the convent was not in theory affected thereby. But the officials appointed to look after the King's interests exceeded their duty to the extent of seizing conventual property. This, to do him justice, Rufus would not permit; and he issued a writ forbidding his officers to molest the convent in the enjoyment of their rights.[2] None the less, the property suffered.

Some three years before his death, in the interval between November, 1097, and March, 1098, Rufus was persuaded to allow the election of a new abbot. This time there was no mere nomination, as in the case of the last appointment, but a real choice on the part of the convent. As might have been expected, there were two factions in the convent, and a lively conflict of opinion resulted. On the one hand were the Normans "qui jam multiplicati invaluerunt," representing the new reforming spirit which had been introduced by Abbot

[1] Simeon of Durham, R.S., i. 124. [2] Cotton MS. Nero D i. fol. 154.

Paul. These constituted a majority among the brethren. But there still remained a solid body of monks of the old school, now grown aged men, with their Saxon obstinacy no whit impaired by advancing years. In the last resort, the younger and more vigorous element carried the day; the new abbot was Richard, surnamed "de Exaquio" or "of Essay". From the worldly point of view, at all events, he was an excellent choice. A stately and dignified man of the best Norman blood, he enjoyed the favour successively of William Rufus and of Henry I, besides being in excellent odour at the Curia. He had at least one powerful kinsman in Robert Bloet, Bishop of Lincoln, to whom perhaps his election was in part due. Certainly Richard looked to his eminent connection for support when difficulties appeared in the government of the Abbey; and it was to Bishop Robert that Henry I directed the charter of 1100, in which St. Albans and its abbot were confirmed in all due rights and privileges.[1]

If increasing wealth and additional dignity constitute any test of well-being, St. Albans flourished exceedingly under the rule of Abbot Richard. Two more cells, Wymondham in Norfolk, and Hatfield Peverel in Hertfordshire, were added to the dependent communities of the House. In addition, the Abbot was successful in acquiring three churches, various parcels of land, and many charges upon tithes. Nor did his care for material things cause him to neglect the other aspects of monastic life. He was at pains to continue the care for learning which had distinguished the rule of Paul. Probably as a consequence of the revenue derived from his new acquisitions he found it possible to extend the resources of the Scriptorium in compliance with the increasing demand for books. Three more writers were added to those already engaged in the work of copying old books or of compiling new ones.

But despite his success as an administrator, Richard was not popular with the monks over whom he ruled. He was rash enough to lease certain Abbey estates to his personal

[1] Cotton MS. Nero D i. fol. 154. "Additamenta," p. 36.

friends, without asking the consent of the convent. Curiously enough, it was again the manor of Sarret which was the principal bone of contention. As we have already seen, it had been given by Paul to Robert the Mason, despite the fact that it was on the demesne of the convent. Robert on his deathbed freely restored it, but to the intense indignation of the monks, Richard granted it away anew, contrary to their express resolution. This time the recipient was a more important person, Peter, the Butler of the Earl of Mortain. Although in accordance with the letter of the rule inculcating the ultimate supremacy of the Abbot in a Benedictine House, such conduct was directly contrary to the spirit which St. Benedict had intended to foster. And from the practical point of view, any political advantages which may have resulted from the Abbot's action must have been more than counterbalanced by the discord which arose within the House. The convent, if powerless to undo any action of their superior, were perfectly capable of making life very unpleasant for him. Nor was Richard the kind of man to endure grimly the results of his own rashness. Lacking the firmness of his predecessor, he was fain to invoke the intervention of the Bishop of Lincoln in order to maintain his authority.

This simple stroke of policy is greeted with a burst of indignation in the "Chronicle". Paris and his successors represent Abbot Richard as a man who made a degrading surrender of the most precious liberties of the House to gain his own petty ends. But as a matter of history, there is not the slightest reason for thinking that in Richard's time the Abbey enjoyed any formal exemption from episcopal authority. The tradition of the House, always prone to antedate its privileges, is eminently untrustworthy evidence upon such a point as this.

The intervention of the Bishop produced the desired result; the authority of the Abbot was restored, and the remaining period of his rule witnessed no falling off in the excellence of discipline. That the standard was high cannot be doubted. When all allowances have been made for the natural partiality

of St. Albans writers, there remains every reason for believing that the Abbey enjoyed a great reputation at the time.[1] As an illustration may be quoted the accounts which have been preserved of the principal event of Richard's rule, the solemn dedication of the new church which Abbot Paul had built. The ceremony, which took place on Tuesday, 28 December, 1116,[2] in the presence of the King and Queen and of a host of nobles, was performed by Robert of Lincoln, assisted by Archbishop Geoffrey of Rouen and by Bishops Ralph of Durham, Richard of London, and Roger of Salisbury. Doubtless to celebrate the occasion, King Henry presented to the Abbey on the same day the church of Biscot in Bedfordshire. The gift was witnessed by a long list of great personages, starting with the Queen and Prince William, and including Robert of Mellent, Stephen of Mortain, Richard of Chester, William of Warenne, and many more. The numerous visitors of all ranks were entertained with great magnificence at the cost of the House, and the feasting was continued until the Epiphany in honour of St. Alban. That the resources of Abbey hospitality proved equal to the strain to which they were subjected says much for the flourishing economic condition of the place.

On the whole, despite the Sarret incident, Richard seems to have reigned with great success; and when he died on 16 May, 1119, he left St. Albans more prosperous and more celebrated than it had ever been before. His successor was another "Francigena," Geoffrey of Maine, a man worthy of note for more reasons than one. Perhaps the first of the many learned Abbots of St. Alban, he had in his youth been a famous schoolmaster, and his entering religion was apparently the result of a curious accident. His reputation as a teacher reached across the Channel, and brought him under the notice of Abbot Richard. The Abbot happened to stand in need of a master to take charge of the school attached to the House; which school, whether founded by himself or by Abbot Paul,

[1] Cf. "Gesta," i. 69.

[2] Erroneously given as in 1115 in the "Gesta". Cf. Nero D i. fol. 154*b*.

was already in a flourishing condition.[1] Geoffrey's arrival being delayed, another man was meanwhile appointed, and Geoffrey in disappointment went to teach at Dunstable. Being a person of ingenuity, he wrote and arranged a miracle-play of St. Catherine for his scholars' performance. To make the scenes more effective, he borrowed from his friend the sacrist of St. Albans some richly ornamented and valuable copes. Doubtless the vestments produced the desired effect, for everything went off well. But on the night after the performance an unforeseen calamity befell. Geoffrey's house was burnt to the ground, and in the conflagration he lost not only his books, but the borrowed copes as well. In order that he might in some measure make good the loss, which from the point of view of a poor schoolmaster was irreparable, he entered religion—"seipsum reddidit in holocaustum Dei," as Paris picturesquely phrases it—and in due time was chosen Abbot of his House by the unanimous voice of the convent.[2]

[1] Cf. Mr. Leach's article in the "V.C.H. Herts," vol. ii. It seems improbable, from our knowledge of the condition of the Abbey in Saxon times, that the school was in existence before the Conquest.

[2] "Gesta," i. 73.

CHAPTER IV.

ABBOT GEOFFREY AND THE REGULATION OF THE HOUSE.

To introduce those changes in domestic administration for which the rule of Abbot Geoffrey is principally remarkable, it becomes at this point necessary to give a short account of the economic development of the House from its foundation to the close of the twelfth century.

The materials for such an account are of the scantiest. In addition to the two garbled charters of Offa, we have some score documents preserved by Paris in Cotton MS. Nero D i., all more or less "worked-up," but purporting to be copies of the actual instruments by which various benefactors conferred land upon the House. Finally, at the end of the period, there is the Great Survey.

If, as has already been suggested, the land-grants mentioned in Offa's charters represent approximately the original endowment of the House, we have some basis upon which our hypotheses may rest. In striking contrast to the impressive list of estates assigned to the King's credit by the fourteenth-century compilers of the "Liber de Benefactoribus,"[1] is the modest grant of eighty mansions described by the two documents. So far as the estates here mentioned can be identified in Domesday, they appear to have represented not more than £60 of revenue at a time when the income from the lands of the House was just over £280. Between the beginning of the ninth and the end of the eleventh century, therefore, the value of the possessions of the Abbey has more than quadrupled. The charters preserved by Paris appear to convey land which, so far as its value can be ascertained, does not seem to have

[1] See above, p. 12.

produced more than a further £60 of revenue. There thus remains to be accounted for land to the value of £160, or rather more than half the revenue at the time of the Survey. How the Abbey came into possession of this property : whether it was the result of the generosity of a few wealthy men, or of the piety of innumerable humble benefactors, cannot be determined. For lack of better information, we must accept the vague statements of the " Liber de Benefactoribus," to the effect

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that in the century and a half preceding the Conquest, estates were showered upon the Abbey by all classes of persons, from Kings of England to simple thegns.[1]

In whatever manner these estates came into possession of the House, it is at any rate certain that at the time of the Survey the land over which St. Alban presided extended to the respectable total of 245 carucates. The bulk of it fell within the hundred called Albanestou, where it constituted

[1] Trokelowe, pp. 431-2, 444-5.

a compact block. This district, which subsequently became known as the Liberty of St. Alban, was of much less extent at the time of the Survey than at a later period: for it afterwards attracted to itself not only portions of the country immediately surrounding it, but, in addition, certain outlying estates in Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire, which in Domesday are still reckoned with their own counties.[1] The Abbots of St. Albans were lords of Albanestou, which they claimed to hold as a Liberty by the grant of King Offa. It is certain, however, that at the time of the Conquest there was no Liberty in the strict sense of the word; for within the boundaries of Albanestou there still existed Kingsbury Castle, which Edgar the Peaceable had forced the Abbot of his day to leave undisturbed as a symbol of royal authority over the land of St. Alban.

The assessment figures are rather curious. The land, as has been said, was reckoned at 245 carucates. Its value in the time of King Edward had been £277, and at the time of the Survey it was £284.[2] None the less, while in former days the assessment had been 176 geld hides, the figure had now fallen to 168 hides. The suspicion raised by these figures, namely, that the Abbey had a "friend at court," is confirmed when we discover that the considerable estates of the House were only liable to the ridiculously inadequate service of six knights. This was indeed beneficial hidation, for the Houses of Peterborough and Bury St. Edmonds, possessing land little if at all more valuable, were reckoned at sixty and forty fees respectively.[3] Probably not least among the benefits for which the Abbey owed thanks to Lanfranc was this elaborate official underestimate of its resources.

Since the days when the Abbots had joined issue with the borough of Kingsbury to protect the settlement which had gathered round the walls of the House, the little town of St.

[1] Cf. "V.C.H. Herts," ii. 320.

[2] The figures given in Dugdale, £263 T.R.E. and £278 T.R.W. are not complete.

[3] "Liber Rubeus," R.S., pp. 14, 17, 359. 618, 619, cxciv, ccxl.

Albans had plainly prospered exceedingly. At the time of the Survey there were forty-six burgesses, besides four foreigners, perhaps dependants of Abbot Paul. There were also sixteen villeins, thirteen bordarers, and twelve cottars. The growing importance of the place is shown by the substantial figure (£11 14s.) of the tolls and market dues, as well as by the ten hide assessment. In all, it was worth £20 a year to the House —a sum which represented a falling off of £4 since the time of King Edward. Of this revenue £2 was produced by the three mills belonging to the Abbot, in which the burgesses were compelled to grind their corn. The town was governed by a Reeve appointed by the Abbot. The burgesses had no control over this officer, whose duties consisted in summoning the borough court, which met every year on St. Margaret's Day: in collecting tolls and dues for the Abbot's use: and in executing the orders of his master within the walls of the town.[1] Despite its subordination to the House, the town was to some extent organized separately from the district surrounding it. But for all important matters the burgesses had to "plead outside their walls" in the Abbot's court of the hundred, which was held under the great ash-tree in the Abbey courtyard. In consequence, as the burgesses grew numerous and wealthy, they became increasingly sensible of the disadvantages under which they laboured; and, as we shall have occasion to remark, their efforts to escape from the jurisdiction of the Abbot led to bitter conflicts between the House and its tenants.

St. Albans was as yet the only town upon the estates of the Abbey: Watford had not yet attained the dignity of an organization separate from that of Caisho. It finds no mention in the Survey.

In addition to the burgesses and foreigners of St. Albans, the Abbot had on his lands 22 free tenants, of whom only 2 appear to have been English.[2] He had also 298 villeins, 75 bordarers, 39 cottars, and 30 slaves. Over all these classes of tenants he exercised the customary seignorial rights. The free tenants owed suit at his hundred court, in addition

[1] Cf. "V.C.H. Herts," ii. 478. [2] See above, p. 35.

to such service, military or otherwise, as happened to be due in each particular case. The villeins and inferior classes supplied the labour required for the cultivation of the sixty-six carucates of demesne which the House retained for its own use. The Abbot was further possessed of certain rights which he could exercise if he so desired, in very oppressive fashion. He had the right of levying tallages upon his villeins and bondmen: he could exact merchet: and he was entitled to a heriot of exceptional value.[1]

It would appear that the influx of foreigners, of which mention has already been made, was no bad thing for the material as well as for the moral well-being of the House. The total value of the estates had increased by £7, or nearly 3 per cent since King Edward's time, and this in spite of certain temporary disabilities, such as the falling-off of the revenue from the town. This may perhaps be ascribed to disturbances accompanying the death or deposition of Abbot Fritheric; for it was in connection with the revenue of the town that the influence of the foreign element produced such marked results. By the time of Abbot Geoffrey the redditus had risen from £20 to £30,[2] and the prosperity of the place steadily increased. But while on the whole the House reaped considerable material benefit from the change, none the less a comparison of the Survey with other sources of information seems to show that the Abbey tradition of loss and damage at the time of the Conquest is not wholly without foundation, although it is exaggerated almost beyond recognition. The House lost a hide in Stotfold (Beds.) to Hugh of Beauchamp,[3] and a hide in Langley to Herbert FitzIvo.[4] It also lost to the lord of Belvoir some land at Studham, which a certain Oswulf had formerly bestowed in the time of Abbot Leofstan;[5] and to Nigel de Albini its reversion of Caddington and Streatley.[6]

[1] Cf. I. S. Leadam in "Trans. Royal Hist. Society," N.S., vi. 27. Vinogradoff, "Villeinage," pp. 153, 160.

[2] "Gesta," i. 77. [3] *Ibid.* and Domesday. [4] Domesday.

[5] Kemble, p. 945. Nero, D i. fol. 150*b*. Domesday.

[6] Cf. "Liber de Benefactoribus" (Trokelowe, pp. 443, 445).

These seem to have been the only losses sustained; and it should be remembered that two at least of the intruders were notable benefactors of the Abbey, to whose generosity the affiliation of the cells of Belvoir and Wallingford[1] was due. As we have seen, both Odo of Bayeux and Remigius of Lincoln had been persuaded to restore the possession they had seized.[2] Also, the loss of the manor of Redburn, which was valued at £30 in the Survey, might have been serious; but fortunately for the Abbey, Lanfranc, into whose hands it had come, freely restored it.

It would appear, then, that at the beginning of the twelfth century St. Albans was in a flourishing condition. Not only had it recovered almost all the estates which had slipped from its hands during the recent disorders, but, in addition, the revenue from its property was upon the increase. This revenue was not, however, its sole source of income. Its situation placed it in a most advantageous position for reaping profit from the travellers who partook of its hospitality, and from the pilgrims who came to visit the shrine of St. Alban. For obvious reasons it is impossible to estimate the revenue derived from these two sources, and this is the more to be regretted because there is every reason to suppose that it represented a considerable proportion of the total income. From the lamentations with which the Abbey writers hail the days when the zeal of the faithful waxed cold, as well as from the fact that at these very periods the House frequently appears in financial difficulties, it is reasonable to conclude that the part played by voluntary offerings in the economy was not inconsiderable. Nor is it without significance that at the very periods when, either from civil commotions or from the materialistic temper of the age, the value of the offerings might be expected to decline, the financial condition of the House is always at the lowest ebb. During the whole of the twelfth century, however, the offerings must have constituted a most lucrative

[1] "Liber de Benefactoribus," loc. cit.

[2] Above, p. 42. Domesday, *s.v.* Tewing and Apsbury. "Liber de Benefactoribus," p. 441.

source of income. A wave of religious enthusiasm swept over Western Europe, and there is no reason for doubting that St. Alban obtained his share of the proceeds. Probably this explains why the rule of Abbot Geoffrey, despite exceptional expenditure, was a time of unexampled prosperity for the Abbey.

As seems to have been usual in the case of the greater Benedictine Houses, the revenue of St. Albans was methodically divided for the support of the various offices. The kitchen, the guest-chamber, the almonry, the sacristy, the Abbot's household, had each their income separate and distinct from the income of the others. Each department managed its own finances, and was in theory accountable to the Abbot and convent for the expenditure of the income derived from its manors and tithe-charges. As a sign, probably, of the ultimate unity of all these separate establishments, it was customary for each department to give to the whole House a gaudy more or less elaborate in proportion to its importance. These gaudies usually took place annually. The Abbot, who had to bear the burden of any sudden call upon the resources, such as taxation Royal or Papal, enjoyed a large revenue independent of that which was necessary for the ordinary expenses of his position. From time to time a generous abbot would set aside a portion of his spare income to meet some expenditure from which the whole House would derive benefit. An instance of such conduct occurs in the rule of Geoffrey, and is connected with that most important of departments, the kitchen.[1]

The main revenue of the kitchen was derived from its manors, and consisted of fifty-three "farms," one for each week of the year, and one over, which went to the upkeep of the utensils. Each weekly "farm" was 46s. and was divided between the monks' cellarer and the cellarer of the Abbot's curia, the former taking 33s. and the latter 13s. How the smaller sum was expended we are not informed; but of the larger sum 3s. went to the nine carriers who brought food from London, and 30s. went to the cost of the food itself.

[1] For following details cf. "Gesta," i. 73-5.

In addition to this revenue, the monks' kitchen by ancient rule had two measures of corn a week, and 60s. in the year to buy milk. Every week, besides, the kitchen received two measures of fine corn from the Abbot, while the monks' buyer supplied fourteen more measures, four of wheat, four of barley, and six of oats. In addition to all this, the two cellarers shared between them two-thirds of certain annual dues (xenia) rendered by the manors on the demesne. These xenia consisted of such renders as the following :—

From Norton and Newnham, 15s. annually, paid in three instalments, upon the feasts of Christmas, Easter, and St. Albans.

From Caisho, 2s. at Christmas and 24 hens: at Easter 2s. and 600 sheep : at St. Albanstide 2s. and 24 cheeses.

From Rickmansworth, 48 hens and 1 pig at Christmas : at Easter, 1000 eggs and 1 pig.

The remaining third of these dues was divided between the guests and the household servants.

But such was now the estimation in which the Abbey was held, and such was the eagerness to enter a school of discipline renowned above all others, that all these resources proved insufficient to support the brethren who flocked to swell the numbers of the convent. In consequence, Abbot Geoffrey added out of his own resources 5s. every week, that is, £13 a year, to the income of the monks' kitchen. As a result of the Abbot's generosity, the kitchen could now spend 5s. every day in the year. Further, Geoffrey made over to the convent all the cheeses which came from the demesnes of Langley, Sandrige, and Walden, which had formerly been reserved for the use of the Abbot's household.

The kitchen was not the only department which had cause to be grateful to Geoffrey. The Abbot handed over to the sacrist the church of Rickmansworth, that the revenue might be used for the supply of church ornaments and—curious afterthought—the repair of the fabric.[1] As some sort of recogni-

[1] Could Geoffrey have foreseen the part which the "expensa circa reparationes" were to play in the Abbey economy, he would doubtless have made more liberal provision for an item which was of such vital importance.

tion of this benefit, the sacrist had to entertain the whole convent sumptuously out of his surplus revenue. The gaudy was to take place every year, on St. Catherine's Day—in memory, apparently, of the Abbot's ill-starred exploit as a dramatist.

Geoffrey next turned his attention to the care of the sick. He introduced new regulations for the management of the infirmary, and he put it for the first time on the level of a separate establishment, with an income of its own.[1] To the Infirmarer was assigned the church of St. Peter in the town as revenue, and he was held responsible for the proper regulation of all matters under his charge—the care of the sick, their meals, their physic, their medical attendance. Out of his surplus revenue he had to find a dole of wine for the convent on certain days. The Abbot made no change in the rule already in force regarding illness, namely, that if brethren were indisposed, and found themselves no better after three days' rest and exemption from services, they might go to the infirmary—unless, indeed, the violence of the disease compelled them to retire there before. In the infirmary, as elsewhere, silence had to be preserved, and convalescents had to take their meals in common. But Geoffrey, with a thoroughness typical of him, took advantage of the opportunity afforded by his new regulations for the infirmary to limit still further the use of meat. Even the sick were to be content with the ordinary diet, unless the nature of their malady made flesh food absolutely essential. In this event, they were to resume their ordinary diet the moment they were fairly on the road to recovery. The working of all these regulations was supervised by the Abbot in person, who made it a rule to visit the infirmary every day, that there might be no opportunity for malingering. The Abbot also reconstructed the infirmary building and provided a chapel.

Geoffrey's care for the sick was not confined to his own flock. He constructed in honour of St. Julian a hospital for poor lepers, situated beside the London road. He endowed

[1] "Gesta," i. 76.

it, he put it in charge of a master, and he provided it with chaplains. From this time onwards it ranked among the cells of St. Albans.

Another addition to the number of dependent communities was made by the Abbot about the year 1140, when he founded and endowed the nunnery of Sopwell. Whether this represented a new venture on the part of the enterprising Geoffrey, or whether it was simply an attempt to house more becomingly the devout women already attached to the Abbey, we do not know. Nothing is to be discovered concerning the nuns who had in former days dwelt in the almonry, except that they still survived in Abbot Paul's time. He regulated their discipline, standardized their habit, and apparently straitened their freedom. Now from this time forward we hear nothing more of them, and we do not know whether they passed out of existence with the coming of an age which looked with suspicion upon the proximity of male and female religious, or whether they were transferred to the new buildings at Sopwell. If the latter hypothesis be correct, it would only constitute a parallel to what had already happened in the case of another cell. Somewhat earlier, the cell of Beaulieu in Bedfordshire had been founded. But its population consisted of St. Albans monks who were living at the time in retreat at Millbrook.[1]

The rule of Geoffrey is noteworthy for other things besides his comprehensive regulations for the well-being of the House. It was a time of remarkable literary and artistic activity. The scriptorium was in an extremely flourishing condition, and the writers were kept hard at work. But the Abbot, whose genius was nothing if not practical, found means to increase the efficiency of the department. Hitherto the penmen had been supported by the tithe-charges conferred upon them in the rules of Abbots Paul and Richard, with the result that the scriptorium had become a separate establishment, which had to be "managed" by its inmates. Financial business occupied time which might have been more profitably employed, and distracted the attention of the writers from their proper occu-

[1] "Gesta," i. 78.

pation. To remedy this, the Abbot arranged an exchange between the scriptorium and the almonry in virtue of which the tithes of Hatfield and certain charges on Redburn were transferred to the latter department, which in return supplied three corrodies to the scriptorium. The three professional penmen were thus saved the trouble of administering their resources, and both departments benefited by the change. The principal work of the scriptorium at this time seems to have consisted in copying books, sacred and secular, for the use of the community. There also seems to have been a certain amount of original composition in the shape of a "Life of St. Alban" in verse, which is preserved at the end of the late fourteenth century "Register of the Charters of St. Albans".[1] The author is said to have been brother Robert of Dunstable, and the date of his work is said to be 1150.

The artistic activity of the House during the rule of Geoffrey appears to have resulted from the presence among the brethren of a single consummate craftsman, Dom Anketil, who had at one time been moneyer to the King of Denmark. Under the guidance of this man St. Albans became a veritable school of the finest gold and silver work. Abbot Geoffrey took full advantage of his skill. Mindful of the catastrophe on that fatal St. Catherine's Day long ago, the Abbot caused seven magnificent copes to be made. The workmanship was of the finest possible quality, and the vestments were stiff with gold and precious stones. Five chasubles were worked at the same time, woven with fine gold throughout, and cunningly ornamented with jewels. But the most notable of all Dom Anketil's work was the construction of a shrine worthy to enclose the miraculous bones of St. Alban. Much labour had been expended upon the preparation of the casket: the sides of it were already covered with jewel-encrusted plates of beaten silver, and more than £60 had been spent upon the work, when a sudden dearth caused the compassionate Abbot to strip off the precious metal and sell it, that the distress of

[1] Brit. Mus. Cotton MS. Julius D iii.

the poor might be relieved. But the next year was one of exceptional plenty, as though the approval of Heaven rested upon the self-sacrifice of Abbot and of craftsman: and the work was begun again upon a scale more magnificent than before. How long the patient Anketil took over his work, we are not told; but by August, 1129, the shrine was sufficiently complete to allow the relics to be translated to their new resting place.

The solemn ceremony took place on 2 August, in the presence of Bishop Alexander of Lincoln, and of the Abbots of Eynsham, Thorney, and Holy Trinity, Rouen, as well as of many other ecclesiastics, including, of course, the whole convent of St. Albans. The ancient "theca" was uncovered, and the bones of the martyr exposed to view. The moment must have been exciting, from the point of view of the spectators as well as of the interested parties, for both the monks of Ely and the monks of Odensee still claimed to possess the genuine relics.[1] The bones were lifted out one by one and exhibited to the assembled crowd. When Ralph, the Archdeacon of St. Albans, came to lift the skull, it was found to have attached to it a label on which were inscribed the words

SANCTUS ALBANUS

to the confusion of the "mendacious monks of Ely". As might have been expected, St. Alban gave convincing proof of the genuine character of his relics by appearing to doubters and reproaching them for their incredulity. When the bones were being sorted, it was noticed that the left shoulder blade was missing. At the time no one had any clue as to its whereabouts; but some years afterwards, if Paris can be believed, intelligence was received that the missing bone was "at the Cathedral of Naumucia in Spain". A long and patently false story was inserted by Paris to account for the fact.[2] Even when the relics had been placed in the new shrine, work could not be suspended, for the metal crest, which was to be the

[1] "Gesta," i. 85, 86.

[2] *Ibid.* 88 *seq.* Nimes is, of course, not in Spain at all.

crowning glory of the casket, was not complete. Despite all Geoffrey's diligence, it remained unfinished at the day of his death.

Relations between Abbot and convent seem to have been more satisfactory than in the time of Richard. Geoffrey was certainly possessed of more tact than his predecessor, and he took the precaution of securing the advice and co-operation of the brethren in his work of reform. All his measures were submitted for the approval of the convent, and were ratified in open chapter.[1] None the less, he seems to have exercised a free hand in dealing with matters financial, and the brethren sometimes complained that he bestowed upon certain of his relatives estates which by right belonged to the monks' table, and that he made, without the consent of the convent, certain unwise grants. But it was generally recognized that the benefits which of his own free will he conferred upon the convent were sufficient to justify him in using his discretion in other directions.

It says much for the earnest, pacific character of monastic life in the twelfth century that even at a House like St. Albans, situated where it could not but be in touch with affairs, little notice is taken of external happenings during the rule of Geoffrey. It is difficult to realize, from the annals of his rule, that during the last six years of it the country was in the throes of civil war. But indications are nevertheless available that the House was hardly as remote from mundane affairs as its inhabitants would have desired. In the critical year 1141, it seems to have inclined towards the party of the Empress—perhaps on account of the nationality of the Abbot. After the defeat and capture of Stephen at Lincoln, the triumphant lady marched upon London, stopping at St. Albans by the way. She was entertained in the sumptuous new guest hall, which had been furnished by the prudent Abbot with a bower for the reception of Queens—the only women permitted to spend the night within the Abbey walls.[2] It was as a result of this visit, presumably, that Geoffrey was forced to melt down

[1] "Gesta," i. 96. [2] *Ibid.* 93.

a silver super-altar in order to ransom the town from Earl Warrenne, William of Ypres, and other of Stephen's supporters. But it speaks well for the repute of the House that although its neutrality may not have been above suspicion, yet it was never sacked by any of the wandering bands of marauders who preyed upon the country in the name of King or Empress. The treasures of the shrine must have presented a great temptation, but we do not hear that any attempt was made upon them. Very possibly, however, it was the necessity of satisfying the demands of these dangerous persons that prevented Geoffrey from putting the finishing touches to the new shrine. Geoffrey died on 24 February, 1146, and was succeeded by a certain Ralph, surnamed Gubiun. The new Abbot had been a secular priest in the service of Bishop Alexander of Lincoln, and had entered religion during the rule of Geoffrey. By a very remarkable exercise of discretionary power, Geoffrey had permitted him to remain in attendance upon his old master. Ralph took advantage of his position to make many friends, and to gather together an extremely good library. Whether his election as Abbot of St. Albans was due to the influence of his master, or whether it was admiration for his learning and business acumen that recommended him to the convent, is impossible to say.

Though a man who combined strength of character with rare financial ability, Ralph was not popular with his monks. Perhaps his friendship with the Bishop of Lincoln stood against him; there must certainly have been some such cause, for the skilful management of finances was usually the quickest road to popularity with the convent. On that score, at any rate, there was only room for one opinion concerning the ability of the Abbot. In a short while he entirely cleared off the debt inherited from his predecessor; and he was also able to complete the work of reorganization by the erection of handsome lodgings for himself and his successors in the office of abbot. He had, however, his own ideas as to the way in which money should be spent; and with what may be termed either regrettable vandalism or sound common sense, accord-

ing to the point of view adopted, he burned the precious copes left by his predecessor in order to extract the metal they contained. He also stripped the shrine of its metal-work. Naturally enough, great murmuring arose among the brethren. But the object of these drastic actions was the sudden raising of money in order to purchase on exceptionally favourable terms the manor of Brantfield. As a consequence of the acquisition, the Abbot was enabled to replace the metal work on the shrine on a scale more splendid than before, and to provide a fund for keeping the roof of the church in repair. None the less, the brethren grumbled that the copes could never be replaced, and that the Abbot had acted far too much upon his own responsibility. On another occasion also, Ralph took the law into his own hands under circumstances which brought him great unpopularity. In the summer of 1149, as he chanced to be passing the bench of Dom Anketil the goldsmith, he noticed an unengraved seal lying there. For some reason of which we are not informed, he connected the seal with Alcuin, his Prior. Realizing the danger of allowing any member of the convent to possess what might be turned into a duplicate seal of the House, capable of being used to pledge abbot and convent in any conceivable manner, he determined to visit the offender with prompt punishment. The Prior was deposed, and found life made so hard for him by the suspicion of the Abbot, that he obtained leave to migrate to Westminster. His training at the model Abbey of St. Albans stood him in such stead that in a short while he rose to be Prior of his new House. The later feeling of St. Albans, as expressed by Matthew Paris, was inclined to exculpate him entirely, and to ascribe the whole incident to the groundless suspicion of Ralph. But if later abbots had exercised equal watchfulness in this most important direction, the House would have been spared some serious trouble.[1]

Just five years after his elevation, Ralph fell severely ill. Too sensible a man to retain office at a time when he was not capable of discharging his duties in an efficient manner, he re-

[1] See below, p. 91.

commended the convent to elect another head while he still lived. Quite soon afterwards, on 6 July, 1151, he died.

His successor was Robert, Prior of the House. He was a nephew of Abbot Geoffrey, and like him a foreigner. He had come to England some years before to visit his uncle, and had obtained permission to enter religion at St. Albans. Evidently a man of great ability, he rose rapidly to the position of sacrist. Nor did he owe his elevation to his relationship with Geoffrey, for soon after the accession of Ralph he received a further step. On the degradation of Prior Alcuin in the summer of 1149, Robert was chosen to replace him. Just two years later, he attained the highest dignity open to him by his election as Abbot.

CHAPTER V.

THE ABBEY IN THE LATER TWELFTH CENTURY.

THE seventeen years during which Abbot Robert ruled St. Albans are noteworthy as being the period of the acquisition of those liberties and exemptions which later writers were wont to base on pre-conquest, nay, on immemorial, prescription. The privileges at that time secured may be conveniently considered under the heads of temporal and ecclesiastical.

When dealing with Abbots Wulsin and Alfric, we had occasion to notice that both found great cause of offence in the proximity of the royal borough of Kingsbury over which they had no control. This may be taken to show that the Abbots of St. Alban, even in the later tenth century, were beginning to aim at independence of the royal authority. By favour of the King, as we saw, they obtained power to ruin the obnoxious *municipium*, but were unable to secure the permission requisite to destroy the castle. This continued to be inhabited by royal servants, as a visible sign that the abbots were not yet masters in their own demesne. By the time of the Norman Conquest, though no further steps appear to have been taken to secure its demolition, the castle probably exercised little restraint upon the power of the abbots, who, one must suppose, took advantage of the weakness of the central government, and assumed quasi-independent authority over their extensive estates. The strong Norman abbots, to whom fell the rule of the House after the Conquest, accepted this state of things as a basis of operations. In the time of Abbot Richard, perhaps on the occasion of the dedication of the great Abbey church, a charter was obtained from Henry I,

which gave the House for the first time a sound legal basis on which to rest its claims of exemption.[1]

The Abbot and convent were granted "sac and soc, toll and team, grithbryce, hamsocne, foresteall, infangestheof and flemenfermthe," together with such profits from their lands and their men as the King's own officers were wont to exact for his use. This was an extremely liberal grant, and was taken in after years to have given the Abbot the right to all amercements taken even before royal justices, within the boundaries of Albanestou. The only disadvantage was that nothing was therein said about the obnoxious royal castle, the occupants of which, seemingly officials and keepers of the peace, continued to exercise a jurisdiction which hampered, if it did not override, that of the Abbot. In the time of Abbot Robert, the nuisance was finally abolished. Some time early in 1154, apparently,[2] King Stephen happened to be on a visit to St. Albans, and Abbot Robert took the opportunity to complain of the troubles and afflictions which the royal servants in Kingsbury caused to St. Alban and his House. Prostrating himself before Stephen, he easily obtained permission to expel the over-zealous royal officers, and to raze the castle to the ground. Thus disappeared the last symbol of royal authority from within the territories of the Abbot. From that time forward the way was clear for the rapid extension of the liberties of the House. Some twenty years later, apparently, in the reign of Henry II, the Abbey obtained its first really comprehensive charter of liberties. This was a magnificent document, not only confirming to the House what it claimed to possess at the time, but conferring upon it "all liberties which Kingly power can bestow on any church".[3] It was sufficiently comprehensive and general to lend royal acknowledgment to the independence at which the abbots aimed. For the next two centuries it was re-

[1] Cotton MS. Nero D i. fol. 154*b*.

[2] Stephen was then in the neighbourhood: Henry of Huntingdon, R.S., p. 290. Gervase of Canterbury, R.S., i. 157.

[3] Dugdale, ii. 228. "Gesta," iii. 63 *seq*.

garded as the palladium of the House, and was confirmed again and again by successive kings. At first its large general expressions were a source of no small advantage to the House, which was able to draw within the bounds of a spacious clause many privileges and rights for which no precise authority could be assigned. Towards the end of the fourteenth century, however, as we shall have occasion to note below, these very general terms, the vagueness of which had been so useful, became a source of disadvantage to the House, owing to the ease with which the legal dexterity of the age could take advantage of the indefinite phraseology therein employed; so that, indeed, in the time of Henry IV, it became necessary to draw up a new version of this charter of Henry II in language more exact. The consequences of the granting of this charter, combined with the destruction of the royal castle of Kingsbury, were soon marked. Less than thirty years after this grant, is found the first mention in official documents of the "liberty of St. Alban," evidently in the sense of a real honorial jurisdiction.[1] It appears that at the time we are considering the lands of St. Alban lying round the House were divided for court leet purposes into three sokes. The most important, that of Park, comprised the manors to the south-east of the Abbey. The halimote was usually held at the Abbey itself under the great ash-tree in the courtyard, or else at Tyttenhangre, the caput of the soke.[2] The second soke was that of Cashio, including apparently Watford and Rickmansworth: the third that of Kingsbury, which included the lands to the north and west of the Abbey.[3] Of these two later sokes there is little to be discovered, and they never possessed an importance comparable to that of Park.

The time of Abbot Robert, which witnessed this accession to the temporal jurisdiction of the House, was yet more remarkable for the growth of its ecclesiastical liberties. As we have already had occasion to notice, the claim advanced

[1] "Curia Regis Rolls," R.C., i. 215.
[2] Paris, "Chron. Maj." vi. 438.
[3] "Gesta," i. 480. "Victoria C. Hist. Herts," ii. 332.

by the monks of St. Alban that from the very foundation of the House they were exempted from episcopal jurisdiction, will not bear serious examination. Even on the showing of the garbled charter of Offa, their assertion is disproved; for the intervention of the neighbouring bishops is therein expressly contemplated in the event of there being any difficulty in electing an abbot by the unanimous voice of the convent. What were the relations between abbot and bishop during the ninth and early tenth centuries, we can only conjecture. But by analogy it seems probable that St. Albans would from the first attempt to close its doors on the bishop within whose diocese it fell, and to reduce the episcopal control to a minimum. In a struggle like this, a monastery would as a rule have a considerable advantage over its opponent, who had not at the back of him that strong corporate feeling which inspired an abbot, however personally insignificant, to take up the cudgels in defence of the claims of his House. By the middle of the tenth century, the Abbey appears to have made some progress; for in the disputed election that followed the death of Abbot "Eadfrith" the convent was allowed, if tradition may be trusted, a whole year to make up its mind as to the choice of a successor.[1] When at last the episcopal authority did intervene, its action merely took the form of a reconciliation between the warring sections of the convent. With regard to the century which separated this incident from the Norman Conquest, we are entirely in the dark. It is natural to suppose that the House continued to take every pains to emancipate itself from the control of the Bishop. That it had some success is perhaps indirectly shown by the otherwise inexplicable hostility with which later tradition regarded the Abbey's great benefactor, Lanfranc. The pride of the convent must have been hurt that an Archbishop of Canterbury should carry his authority to the point of forcing his nominee upon them as Abbot, even when that nominee was a man like Paul of Caen. In the time of Abbot Richard, the House was withdrawn, it seems, from the control of Canterbury, only to fall beneath

[1] "Gesta," i. 22.

the more effective because more immediate sway of Lincoln. The intervention of the Bishops of Lincoln seems to have been really effectual for the next half-century,[1] and it probably accounts, among other things, for the election of Abbot Ralph. It was felt to be unendurably irksome, and Richard was looked upon as a traitor to the best interests of the House because he was the first to invoke it. None the less, as has been incidentally remarked, there are no signs that the House had as yet any better claim to exemption from episcopal authority than certain vague memories of Anglo-Saxon days, when the power of the bishops as a whole was far less considerable than in the twelfth century. One sign of growing independence of diocesan authority is indeed visible at this time—the existence of a separate archdeacon for the domain of the House. This official, since he is described as a member of the convent, was probably now, as later, appointed by the Abbot.[2] Whether there was an Archdeacon of St. Albans in pre-conquest times, or whether his existence was a consequence of the multiplication of archdeaconries following the ordinance of William I, withdrawing spiritual pleas from the hundred court, it is impossible to say with certainty.

Thus when Robert became Abbot of St. Albans, the Bishop of Lincoln was in a position to exercise considerable authority over the House, whether or not he was in the habit of so doing. Three years after the accession of Robert, however, a man born within the jurisdiction of the House attained to the highest dignity in Christendom, and was destined to make use of his authority for the benefit of the Abbey which, if tradition be correct, he had tried unsuccessfully to enter in the days of his youth. On 4 December, 1154, Nicholas Breakspear was elected Pope, and assumed the title of Adrian IV—a title which must have reminded all loyal monks of St. Albans of the Pope who was reputed to have endowed them with their initial privileges, Adrian I. Abbot Robert evidently saw at once that the elevation of this man presented a notable opportunity of acquiring privileges for the House; and less

[1] See above, p. 47.

[2] "Gesta," i. 86.

than a year after the election, on 9 October, 1155, he set out for Rome with the ostensible object, it seems, of assisting in the settlement of some royal business which was in progress at the curia.[1] Having secured a favourable reception from the Pope, he proceeded to air his grievances, and related the various indignities to which the House had been subjected by the interference of the Bishop of Lincoln. The Pope, who seems to have been glad of the opportunity of showing his friendship for a house with which he was connected by many ties,[2] listened sympathetically, and replied by granting to St. Albans the famous privilege "Incomprehensibilis".[3] The effect of this was to make the abbots of St. Albans first in dignity among English abbots: to release the House from all episcopal authority save that of the supreme Pontiff: and to secure its exemption from all visitations save from that of a "legate a latere". At the same time another privilege was obtained, bestowing upon the House the "processions" from the parish churches in the county of Herts—a due which had previously been enjoyed by the episcopal authority at Lincoln.[4] Letters were at this time also dispatched to Archbishop Theobald[5] and to King Henry II,[6] commending the Abbey to their especial protection. While Robert was at Rome, he took the opportunity of presenting for the approval of the Pope the rules which had been recently drawn up for the regulation of the Guest-House at St. Albans. Hospitality was now evidently among the most important functions of the Abbey, a result, as it seems, of the rapidly increasing trade of London—"ubi totius regni cursus est populorum,"[7] and the day is not distant when the House will boast that in its great stables horses to the number of 300 at a time are accommodated.[8]

[1] "Gesta," i. 126.

[2] According to the St. Albans story, his father had been a monk of the Abbey; and he himself had only failed to enter religion there from lack of learning. "Gesta," i. 124, 125.

[3] Jaffé, ii. 10113. "Gesta," i. 128.

[4] Jaffé, ii. 10114.

[5] *Ibid.* 10117.

[6] *Ibid.* 10116.

[7] "Gesta," i. 128.

[8] Paris, "Chron. Maj.," *sub anno* 1252.

Taking his leave of the Pope, Abbot Robert returned home, arriving safely at St. Albans on the last day of May, 1156. He took the earliest opportunity of exhibiting to the world his newly-acquired privileges, well knowing that the Lincoln authorities would not relinquish their claims upon the Abbey without a struggle. Indeed, for the next half-dozen years, there is a running fight between the Abbey and the Bishop, who is supported by the Chapter of his cathedral. Shortly after his return, the Abbot took the chance afforded him by a meeting of the Great Council in London to publish abroad his privileges. Robert de Cheseny, Bishop of Lincoln, being unwilling to submit to the humiliation of hearing his claims rebutted, purposely absented himself, but sent proctors to keep a watchful eye upon proceedings. The Lincoln party seem to have anticipated the emancipation of the Abbey from the authority of the Bishop, but the other privileges took them completely by surprise. When they heard of the privilege conferring upon the Abbey the yearly "processions" of clergy and laity from the county of Herts, they broke into angry exclamations, and summoned their opponent to a trial before Papal delegates. The Abbot was nothing loth; but before the trial could come off, the Bishop of Durham brought about a preliminary meeting in which a form of compromise was dictated by Gilbert Foliot and agreed to by both churches.[1] It was, however, a mere truce, while both parties gathered their resources. Abbot Robert dispatched envoys to Rome to secure Papal support. These managed things so well that they shortly returned in great triumph with two fresh grants. The first was a full confirmation of all the privileges enjoyed by the House; the second was nothing less than the desideratum of every great abbot in England—the right of celebrating mass in full pontificals.[2] As might be expected, the wrath of the Lincoln people blazed out anew on hearing of these fresh privileges. They spoke slightingly of the Pope, and, what was much more formidable from the monks' point of view, they laboured hard to arouse the anger of Henry II

[1] "Gesta," i. 131. [2] *Ibid.* 133.

against the House. Hugh of Durham again offered his services as mediator, but without success. Neither party would agree to a compromise, for both anticipated a complete victory. In particular, the Lincoln party only awaited the death of the "St. Albans Pope" before making a determined attempt to reassert their claims. Until September, 1159, both parties maintained an armed neutrality. But on the election of Alexander III the struggle broke out anew. The Abbey had once more a considerable advantage; not only had the new Pope, when Chancellor, shared the partiality of Adrian for St. Albans, but he was also determined to carry on the traditional Papal policy of weakening the power of the local bishops by breaking down all barriers separating individual ecclesiastics from Rome. Hence it came about that Abbot Robert's emissary had little difficulty in obtaining, in January, 1161, a complete confirmation of the privileges of the Abbey, conveyed in a document beginning "Quoniam sine vero cultu religionis".[1] Only one hope now remained to the Lincoln party: could they secure the support of the King, and thus make it dangerous to put into operation a privilege that was legally unassailable? If the St. Albans story is to be believed, the complaints of the Bishop met with a reception so favourable from the King that Bishop Robert determined to attempt to exercise jurisdiction over the House. His claim not being admitted he obtained royal letters directing the dispute to be brought to a settlement before the Earl of Leicester and three Bishops. The case came up for trial at Winchester on 1 February, 1163. The Bishop's advocates put forward prescriptive claims, exhibiting professions of obedience to Lincoln signed by Abbots Richard, Geoffrey, and Robert himself. The St. Albans people asserted that the professions were a matter of form, denied the prescription, and put forward their recent privileges. Owing to the superior skill of his advocates, the Abbot had slightly the advantage: but so complex was the case, that it was adjourned until the following 3 March for the hearing of the King, who was at the moment abroad. Meanwhile the

[1] Jaffé, ii. p. 152 (misread by Riley as "Quum . . .").

Bishop had been carrying on the campaign elsewhere, and having outwitted the Abbot's advocates at the Curia, suddenly brought into court a bull dated March, 1162, ordering the St. Albans people to make good their claims before a delegacy of two Bishops.[1] As the Lincoln party doubtless had foreseen, the effect of this clever move was to awaken the wrath of the King against the Abbot, who was suspected of conniving at an attempt to withdraw the case from the competence of the royal tribunals. Henry insisted that the trial should take place as arranged; and early in March the Abbot journeyed to Westminster, well fortified with muniments and witnesses to prove that previous to the time of Abbot Richard, a purely formal submission only had been paid to Lincoln, and that the ordination of monks and the consecration of altars had from time to time been performed by Bishops other than those in whose jurisdiction the House was alleged to stand.[2] The King in person examined the Abbey muniments, particularly the charters of Offa and of Henry I. He expressed his approval of the Abbot's evidence, even assisting him to rebut some attacks upon their authenticity. He had no objection to the privileges conferring the pontificalia—which were a particular source of annoyance to the Lincoln people—but was annoyed to discover an agreement between St. Albans and the Pope for a yearly payment of an ounce of gold from the Abbey in return for a confirmation of all past and future privileges. This he considered to be derogatory to his dignity, but suffered himself to be appeased by the Abbot.[3] In the end, he became convinced that the claims of the House were unimpeachable, and on hearing that the claims of the Bishop were based upon prescription alone, strongly advised him to compromise. As a result, the Bishop, in consideration for an annual payment of £10 entirely renounced any claim he might have over the Abbey. Deeds were accordingly drawn up, and the Bishop was seized of the manor which represented the capital from which the yearly income of £10 was derived. The victory of the House was for the moment complete; and

[1] Jaffé, ii. 10703. [2] "Gesta," i. 147-9. [3] *Ibid.* 152.

as a fitting symbol of his triumph, Abbot Robert celebrated mass on next Easter Day in full pontificals.[1]

Besides being a defender so diligent of the rights of the House, Abbot Robert was no mean steward of its temporalities. His period of rule is remarkable for the number of lawsuits in which the House became involved through safeguarding the old, or defending the new acquisitions. Among the more noteworthy of these suits, as illustrating one of the serious dangers to which a religious house was exposed from the dishonesty of its tenants, is that in which the Abbot engaged with the family of Valoignes. Since the time of Abbot Paul, the wood of Northaw had been in their possession for an annual rent. After fifty years of occupancy, they considered that they had acquired an indefeasible right in it. Robert quickly realized that the House was in some danger of losing its property; and on the death of the younger Peter in 1159 he entered into possession of the wood. After much litigation, in the course of which the Abbey was compelled to invoke the protection of the Pope, the right of St. Alban was vindicated.[2] The expenses must have been very heavy, and the whole incident goes far to justify the disapproval with which the convent always viewed the letting out of Abbey lands to laymen for an annual rent. Not long after this, Robert became involved in the first of the many disputes that troubled the House in connection with its dependent cells, which, if they conferred upon St. Albans considerable dignity, also constituted no common source of weakness. Whenever the prior of a cell got into trouble, the Abbot was certain to find himself involved. In the present instance, the Prior of Wymondham treated some of his tenants with undue harshness; they accordingly appealed to the Abbot. The Prior on his part appealed to the Earl of Arundel, who was patron of the cell, and bade defiance to his superior. It cost the Abbot forty marks and much trouble, before he was able to adjust matters with the Earl and to assert his authority.[3]

On the whole, despite these manifold disputes and conflicts,

[1] "Gesta," i. 158. [2] *Ibid.* 166. [3] *Ibid.* 174.

the reign of Abbot Robert was a time of great prosperity for the House. The reputation it enjoyed is shown by the fact that no fewer than three members of its convent were chosen to preside over other religious houses in order that the perfection of discipline which characterized St. Albans might be introduced elsewhere. During the time of Robert, Brother Germanus became Abbot of Selby,[1] Brother Godfrey became Abbot of Croyland,[2] and Brother Laurence was selected to preside over Westminster.[3] To crown all, the year before the death of Robert, the Abbot of St. Albans took his seat above all the other abbots of England in the General Council held at Tours in 1163.[4]

There were few valuable acquisitions of property in his day, the most noteworthy being that of the church of Luton. The particulars of this are curious, though of small importance to the general history of the Abbey. They will be found fully worked out in a contribution to the October number of the "English Historical Review" for 1913.

If little money had been expended in acquiring fresh possessions for the House, there had also been but small outlay in building. The only work of any importance undertaken by Abbot Robert was the construction of the Chapter House. It might therefore have been expected that the finances of the Abbey would be in a flourishing condition. Such, however, was not the case. When Robert died on 23 October, 1166, the House was estimated by the royal officials to be more than 600 marks in debt—a sum which represented more than a year's total revenue from the landed estates.[5] Much of this debt was, it would seem, excusable, being a result of necessary litigation and of the expenses incidental to the acquisition of the new privileges. The Abbot had added unnecessarily to his financial difficulties, however, by injudicious gifts to his own family. That the general management of the economy of the House had been in prudent hands during the reign of Robert, may be conjectured from the great reputation of the

[1] "Gesta," i. 120. [2] *Ibid.* 121. [3] *Ibid.* 159.
[4] *Ibid.* 177. [5] *Ibid.* 183.

principal business man of St. Albans, one Adam the Cellarer. So much did he impress the convent with his financial ability, that after his death he was accorded the extraordinary honours of burial among the abbots and of commemoration on an anniversary, as though he had been an abbot himself.[1] The fact that with all Adam's skill and care he was unable to keep the House clear of debt is very significant. It is the first indication of the financial weakness which seemed to haunt the Abbey even in its most brilliant days, a permanent indication that, great as were the resources of the House, they were not large enough to support adequately the expenses due to its position as the premier Benedictine Abbey of England.

It was during the time of Robert that the care lavished upon the library and scriptorium by Paul and his successors began to produce its fruit. St. Albans had long been the home of learning; it was now to become a centre of literary composition. The famous financier Adam employed his leisure in drawing up a Rotulus of occurrences during his lifetime—a composition which was among the sources afterwards employed by Matthew Paris as material for his own more pretentious works.[2] It was perhaps unfortunate that all the writing which was going on at St. Albans about this time was not of such a reputable character as the Rotulus of Adam. For it was probably towards the end of Robert's abbacy that a certain William of St. Albans began to compose the "Acta SS. Albani et Amphibali,"[3] which is among the most tiresome and clumsy of monastic forgeries. This is stated by the author to be a literal translation from the original English—William had not the wit to make it British—"Life of St. Alban," written by contemporaries. Careful examination shows, as might be expected, that it is nothing but a rather clumsy amplification of Bede's account. It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that the

[1] "Gesta" i. 121, 206.

[2] Cf. the note on fol. 30*a* of Cotton MS. Nero D i. "Secundum antiquum Rotulum Bartholomei Clerici qui cum Adam cellerario diu fuit serviens ei et ipsum Rotulum sibi retinuit de scriptis suis hoc solum eligens." See "E.H.R.," vol. xxviii. pp. 719, 720, notes 3, 4, 5.

[3] "Acta SS. Boll. Jun.," iv. 149-59.

Convent of St. Albans, dissatisfied with the brevity of existing accounts of their patron, deliberately set about the fabrication of a longer and more circumstantial narrative.[1] In the course of his work, William contrived to make notable addition to the saints held in honour at his House. For the first time, reverence is paid to a certain St. Amphibalus, styled the confessor, for whose sake St. Alban suffered martyrdom. The new saint is a fabrication of the pious fancy: the name is first found in Geoffrey of Monmouth's fabulous History, and was thence adopted by William.[2] It is now universally acknowledged to have arisen from a puerile misreading of a certain passage in the "Epistle" of Gildas.[3] This, however, did not prevent William from composing a long and entirely fictitious account of the sayings and doings of this alleged teacher of St. Alban.

However curious and unwarrantable such an expedient may sound to modern ears, it does none the less afford evidence that the Abbey had already embarked upon that long career of literary activity which gives it a place of honour apart from all other English religious Houses. Nor was the literary tradition suffered to decay in the time of Abbot Robert's successor.

On the death of Robert, the King as usual entered upon the temporalities of the House, but left the administration in the hands of Simon the Prior, and Cellarer Adam. Henry II was in no hurry to give leave for a new election, but continued to enjoy the profits of the House for four months. At last he consented to the election of a successor to Robert, but only in accordance with a method of his own which is without parallel in the history of the Abbey. By his orders, the Bishop of London was to be a witness of the election by the convent of three candidates, of whom the King would afterwards select one as Abbot.[4] This command must have been

[1] Cf. Baring-Gould and Fisher, "Lives of British Saints," i. 144.
[2] "Hist. Brit.," v. c. 5.
[3] J. Loth, "Saint Amphibalus" in "Révue celtique," xi. 348.
[4] "Gesta," i. 183.

extremely irksome to the convent, who were not only deprived of the right of electing in secret, but also of the final choice of a Father Superior. The King, however, who probably only desired to be sure that a fitting person was chosen to the premier House of the land, seems to have made no attempt to influence the choice of the convent, and himself made a wise selection from the three candidates. Simon the Prior was chosen as successor to Robert, and was instituted on 20 May, 1167.

It is impossible to imagine a greater contrast in monastic annals than in those which depict the reigns of Robert and of Simon respectively. The former period had been as agitated as the latter was peaceful; after long struggles for the acquisition of privileges, the House was suffered for a while to enjoy them in peace. And it is difficult to conceive of a more just example of the way in which the personal character of the reigning Abbot shaped the whole destinies of the House during his period of rule. Robert had been strong, ambitious, and practical; Simon was gentle, peaceable, and of studious bent. The time of the former had been full of exciting incident, a period of continual combat, punctuated here and there by notable triumphs; the rule of the latter was principally remarkable for the care with which the literary activity of the House was fostered by the Abbot himself.

Simon was a great lover of learning. He endeavoured to attract men of culture to the Abbey, and to make the House a centre of learned activity as well as a model of monastic discipline. He bestowed much trouble in the regulation of the scriptorium, which had not perhaps flourished as of old during the excitements of Robert's rule. He enlarged its revenues, and ordained that in future every Abbot should maintain at his own expense one "special" writer, in addition to the ordinary inmates of the scriptorium.[1] Being himself a bibliophile, he maintained two or three writers of great skill at his own expense, entertaining them generously at his lodgings. He was thus able to secure the careful copying of many

[1] "Gesta," i. 192.

books, which he caused to be kept all together in a special painted aumbry, so that they might always be available for the use of the House. A very pleasing illumination in Cotton MS. Claudius E IV i. 124 represents the Abbot seated by the side of this book-chest, regarding with pride the goodly volumes within. During the time of Simon, the tradition of historical writing initiated by Adam the Cellarer was not suffered to die out. There is some evidence that about the year 1180 a certain Walter, a monk at St. Albans, wrote a chronicle of English affairs[1] which in all probability comprised the work of Adam, amplified and brought up to date. Whether the name Walter be a mistake for William, the composer of the forged "Life of St. Alban," may perhaps be open to question. But if in addition to Adam there was a Walter besides a William, engaged in literary composition in the last quarter of the twelfth century, it seems plain that the days of St. Albans' fame as a centre of historical writing were then already fast approaching.

The activities of Simon were artistic as well as literary. Apparently no work of any magnitude had been done upon the shrine of St. Alban since it had been repaired after the much-discussed stripping by Abbot Ralph. Simon now turned his attention to it. He was fortunate in possessing among the convent a brother who exceeded even the famous Anketil in his skill—Master John "the incomparable goldsmith". Simon took advantage of the craft of John to embark upon a radical alteration of the structure of the shrine. He had it placed upon an elevated stone base behind the high altar, so that it could be seen by the celebrant. The body of the shrine was apparently composed of plates of beaten metal, covered with designs representing incidents in the life of the Saint. Similar to this had been the destroyed work of Anketil. All the skill of John was lavished upon the construction of the roof. On the western end of it, surrounded with gold and jewels, was seated a figure of the Virgin and her Son, enthroned in glory; on the Eastern end, an image of the Crucified, while high above

[1] Pits, "De Illustribus Scriptoribus Angliae," 845; Hardy, "Materials," III, xxxvi.

towered the lofty crest of the shrine, with four turrets at the four corners. The entire structure was wonderfully ornamented with crystals and precious stones.[1]

During the whole lifetime of Simon, St. Albans must have been a centre of artistic production. In addition to the wonderful work done upon the shrine, the Abbot caused John to labour at a chalice and pyx made entirely of gold encrusted with gems. Three chalices of exquisite workmanship, two of gold and one of silver: a cross of gold filigree to contain a fragment of the True Cross; and an elaborate vessel in the form of a shrine to contain the Host when it was borne "to the tabernacle (*papilionem*) in the cemetery" on Palm Sunday: such were some of the precious objects which goldsmith John produced under the encouragement of Simon.

About this time there occurred a curious sequel to the embodiment of St. Amphibalus in William's "Life". A certain Robert Mercer of St. Albans asserted in 1178 [2] that he had received revelation of the burial-place of St. Amphibalus. A search made at the spot indicated revealed certain human remains, which were acclaimed as the relics of St. Amphibalus and of his martyred companions. The bones were solemnly translated to the Abbey, and in the time of the next Abbot were enclosed in a shrine specially made to receive them. Such was the Invention—the word sounds strangely appropriate in modern usage—of St. Amphibalus. There can be no doubt that the Abbot was made the victim of a pious fraud, if he was not himself a party to it. Mercer presumably came upon an ancient cemetery, and invented the dream to explain his discovery. It would perhaps be too bold an assertion that this fraud was stimulated by the finding of the Eleven Thousand Virgins at Köln in 1155,[3] but the coincidence of two such discoveries is at least remarkable. That these visions were deliberately fabricated for the sake of gain, can hardly be asserted. But it should be noticed that when, in the time of Abbot Warin, St. Amphibalus was said to have intimated that he

[1] "Gesta," i. 189. [2] Paris, "Chron. Maj.," *sub anno.*
[3] Baring-Gould and Fisher, op. cit. i. 153.

desired the spot where his relics had been found to be considered holy, it was the son of the man to whom the first vision had been vouchsafed, who was appointed Master of St. Mary des Prez, the house built to mark the site of the exhumation.[1]

It is curious how little connection Abbot Simon maintained with the outside world during his period of rule. There were no lawsuits, no acquisitions, and seemingly, no losses during those halcyon days. Only once was the Abbot drawn for a moment into the stir of the world which lay beyond his peaceful precincts. In 1170 he attempted, at some personal inconvenience, to restore harmony between the younger Henry and Archbishop Thomas. The Abbot's mediation was fruitless, and before the end of the year his friend had suffered martyrdom.[2]

As might have been expected from his disposition, Abbot Simon was a bad steward of the temporalities of the House. He did not take any of the opportunities that offered themselves for adding to the property of the House, and he allowed its resources to depreciate. In consequence, he was compelled to borrow heavily to meet the cost of his various enterprises. When he died in 1183 he left the House more than 200 marks in debt to Christians, and, in addition, 700 marks were owing to less pleasant creditors. With deep shame the Abbey writers record how Aaron the great Jew of Lincoln boasted that *he* had made the splendid new shrine for St. Alban, and had found him a resting-place when he was homeless.[3]

On the death of Simon there was a free election, which, for the first time since the Conquest, was disputed. The sacrist William opposed the election of Prior Warin through jealousy, and attempted to prejudice his chances by making injurious reflections upon his character, his personal appearance, and the status of his family. When allowances are made for pique, he certainly diagnosed his rival with great perspicuity, openly telling the convent that when they found themselves set firmly beneath Warin's heel they would be sorry that they had not listened to the advice of their sacrist. None the less,

[1] "Gesta," i. 201. [2] *Ibid.* 188. [3] *Ibid.* 194.

Warin, who, as a man learned beyond the common, doubtless appealed to the pride of the convent, was duly elected, and received benediction on 8 September, 1183. His first act was to make his brother, who had once been a student at Salerno, and had entered St. Albans at the same time as himself, Prior in his stead. Now the power of the Prior of St. Albans was considerable. He was responsible for the discipline of the House; but he did not confine his activities to internal matters alone. Sometimes a Prior of St. Albans would be honoured with a mandate from the Pope even during the lifetime of an Abbot.[1] Together, Abbot and Prior wielded great influence, and none dared oppose them within the House. The two brothers had a nephew learned like themselves and called Warin. He came to take charge of the School of St. Albans, and to assist his uncles with his deep legal knowledge. Altogether, the triple alliance was so formidable that, as the sacrist had prophesied, the convent was afraid to murmur whatever the Abbot might do. He carried all things at his will: he made injudicious alienations of Abbey property for the endowment of the House of St. Mary des Prez for leprous nuns: he felled the woods, and actually set up a sort of timber-merchant's office, in which he did a brisk trade to his own gain but to the infinite damage of the property under his care.[2]

Despite his absolutism, he was no tyrant: indeed, fault could be found rather with his indulgence to the brethren than with his excessive sternness. Benefits hitherto unknown were allowed to the minuti: they had formerly been bled at noon; now they were to be bled "ante prandium"; and after Compline, they were allowed in the Guest's Parlour for recreation, while the servants ate. The same privilege was granted them after refection. In former times they had been excused from attending Divine service on one night only; they were henceforth allowed two nights' indulgence. At the same time was introduced another privilege which opened the way for later abuses. One of the most important provisions of the Rule, because so contrary to ordinary custom, was that which for-

[1] "C.P.L.," 1205 (23), 1218 (60), 1233 (136). [2] "Gesta," i. 216.

bade the use of flesh in the refectory. Indeed the observance of this enactment may, at all events in the early years of post-Conquest Benedictinism, be taken as a touchstone of the excellence of the discipline observed in any given house. Abbot Warin, while not interfering with the operation of this provision, yet made it more easy for subsequent times to avoid it. He ordered that sick monks, unwilling to go to the refectory, might dine on meat in the oriel. Certain other regulations were passed at the same time which appear to indicate that there had been a little relaxation of the rigour of the Rule during the last few years: Divine service was somewhat shortened, in order that it might be performed in more seemly fashion: and convalescent brethren were allowed a relaxation of the Rule of Stability, in that they were permitted to go to the cell of Redburn to recreate themselves.[1] The effect of this provision was at last to convert Redburn into a sort of country-house, whither the members of the convent resorted in turn on light duty, although it was long before the consequences of it were perceived.

The time of Warin is noteworthy for a renewed attempt of the Church of Lincoln to bring St. Albans once more beneath its sway. Bishop Walter of Lincoln complained to the King, who happened to be at St. Albans, of the way in which his position had been prejudiced by the imprudence and pusillanimity of his predecessor, who had agreed to allow the Abbey independence. Warin at once took the King to witness that the dispute had been fairly settled by compromise. The King, in some indignation, swore that he had himself assisted at a just settlement, and that he would not now suffer the Abbey to be molested.[2] So the danger passed, to the great joy of the House.

This was not the only occasion on which Warin's friendship with a King of England stood him in good stead. The Abbot, if the St. Albans writers are to be believed, was honoured with the friendship of Richard Lion Heart. This friendship involved him in heavy expenses for entertainment

[1] "Gesta," i. 212-3. [2] *Ibid.* 178.

on at least one occasion, but it also had its advantages. When in 1193 the demand came for all the chalices in England to pay the ransom of Richard, the Abbot was allowed to save, at the cost of 200 marks, the precious vessels of the House, which must have been worth, owing to the excellence of their workmanship, far more than the weight of the metal of which they were composed.

On the whole, Warin seems to have been a good abbot. A strong ruler he certainly was, and the convent could not forgive his stern ways and harsh dealings with those who resisted his authority. On 29 April, 1195, Warin died, and was succeeded by a very notable man, John, surnamed "Of the cell," apparently because he was Prior at Wallingford when he was elected. He was the first abbot to be chosen from among the heads of the houses dependent upon St. Albans, though he was not by any means the last. Once again the convent had signified its tastes in an unmistakable manner by choosing the most learned man available. But though a fine scholar, he was too much of a student and too little a man of the world to be a good choice as head of a great House. His fortune took him into troublous paths, through the mazes of which he found his way not without difficulty and even disaster.

CHAPTER VI.

TROUBLES WITHIN AND WITHOUT.

AT the very beginning of his period of rule, John exhibited a lack of sound sense. His predecessor had left him 100 marks for the repair of the buildings, and upon this very inadequate provision John proceeded to pull down the west front of the church. Doubtless the simplicity of the work of Paul of Caen failed to appeal to the more elaborate taste of the thirteenth century; but it would have been well to reflect that the west front, solidly constructed of Roman tile, was the strongest part of the fabric. This, however, was not the worst. Misled by a rascally master of works, the Abbot was induced to plan his operations on a scale so magnificent that all his money was exhausted before the foundations rose to the level of the surrounding soil. Misfortunes followed fast upon one another. Winter arrived, and severe weather rotted the unprotected stone. The masons, finding that there was no more money to be had, decamped in despair, leaving behind them an unsightly ruin. By this time every one, most of all the Abbot, was heartily tired of the whole business. Strenuous efforts were made to bring the building operations to a conclusion. The Abbot raised an emergency fund by setting aside one sheaf from every acre of arable land belonging to the House, and he lavished in the same way all the money he could get together. All ordinary means of meeting the expenditure having been tried with indifferent success, John adopted the curious expedient of sending round the country a clerk, who alleged that he had been raised from the dead by the merits of St. Alban, in order that the faithful might be moved by piety to minister to the needs of the Saint. But, as Paris

mourns, "that unlucky work absorbed everything, as the sea absorbs rivers, deriving therefrom no increase". Without abandoning his efforts on behalf of the main scheme, John embarked upon enterprises conceived on a scale which brought them within the range of his resources. We can only conclude that such works as the rebuilding and extension of the refectory, and the reconstruction of the dortoir were now absolutely necessary owing to the increasing numbers of the convent: otherwise to have engaged upon them at this moment would have been the height of folly. As it was, the monks were deprived of their wine for fifteen years, in order that funds might be found for the building. And it is typical of the spirit animating the convent at this time that the abandonment of wine, no small sacrifice for a monastic community, was entirely voluntary.

Although the expenditure of the Abbot upon structural alterations produced a constant shortage of money, yet there was no cessation in the literary and artistic activities which had characterized the reigns of his immediate predecessors. Indeed, the quantity of the House's production in these spheres seems rather to have been upon the increase. It is true that we hear no more of metal-work: perhaps the incomparable John had died leaving no successor. But in place of it there went on much mural painting. The walls of the church were decorated with pictures of the saints, executed with a skill which surprised contemporaries, by the members of a single artistic family. This family consisted of Brother William of Colchester, William's brother Simon, and Simon's son Richard. Some of these paintings have fortunately survived, and within living memory have been disentombed from the whitewash which for centuries concealed and preserved them. Although sadly damaged by time and carelessness, the fragments which remain upon the pillars and walls of the nave clearly indicate that the praises lavished by Abbey writers upon William and his colleagues were not undeserved.

Nor was learning neglected. The Abbot himself was at once a scholar of parts and an enthusiastic bibliophile. He

presented many notable volumes to the library, among which the "Historia Ecclesiastica" of Petrus Comestor receives special mention.[1] There was, in addition to a general interest in learning, some more specialized form of cultural activity among the inmates of the scriptorium at the time. Historical composition was unquestionably going on at St. Albans, associated by later tradition with the pen of the Abbot himself. It is highly probable that John employed the leisure won for him by his retiring habits in work of this kind; although it cannot be determined whether thirteenth century tradition is right in ascribing to him the authorship of the "Chronicle of England" which subsequently became embodied in the "Flores" of Roger of Wendover.[2] The author, whether Abbot John or another, was not the first member of the congregation of St. Albans to undertake work of the kind. The compilations of Adam the Cellarer, and probably of Walter, lay ready to his hand.

Though practical wisdom was far from being his strong point John was not a weak ruler. The discipline he maintained was particularly severe, and he could not brook the slightest opposition to his will. The consequences of this were curious. Just as in the nation at large there was then a notable struggle between a king who would be absolute, and a constitutional party desiring the supremacy of law; so on a miniature scale a contest of similar character went on at St. Albans, a reflection, as it were, of the great events which were happening outside the walls. The Benedictine Rule, though laying due stress upon the ultimate supremacy of the Abbot, contained within itself the germs of a lively constitutional situation. The importance assigned to the daily Chapter, and the admonitions bidding the superior consult with the wisest of the brethren in difficult situations, tended to produce feelings hostile to any absolutism on the part of the Abbot.

We have already had occasion to remark the strength of the convent's prejudice against the taking of any important

[1] "Gesta," i. 242. [2] Luard, "Chron. Maj." II,, x.

step on the sole authority of the Abbot. During the reigns of John and of his immediate successor this feeling found expression, and there was a sharp though short constitutional struggle within the House. The object was primarily to determine whether there should or should not be any change in the traditional supremacy, in last resort, of the Abbot in matters affecting the welfare of the whole congregation. As we shall see, the attempt of the convent to exercise a controlling authority in the affairs of the House was thwarted by the firm policy of successive abbots; so that in less than half a century all trace of constitutional opposition to the Abbot vanished completely. John for his part showed that he was not prepared to make any concession to the demands of the convent. He adopted the effective policy of banishing to distant cells all those brethren whom he suspected of desiring to weaken his authority. In this course of action he persisted, disregarding protests and even open clamours in Chapter.[1] On one occasion the "constitutional party" made a tremendous effort to subject the Abbot to restraint. The Legate Gualo happened to be on a visit to the House, and, as was usual in the case of visitors so distinguished, was invited to be present in Chapter. Certain of the brethren attempted to bring the Abbot to book in the hearing of the Legate, on the charge of wrongfully alienating some property belonging to the House. Doubtless they hoped that the Legate would support their protest, and demand some inquiry into the conduct of the Abbot. They were grievously disappointed. Gualo unhesitatingly supported John, and, after rebuking the unruly brethren with much severity, commanded them to the fatherly chastisement of their superior. John rather naturally took severe measures against those who had attempted to affront him in public. He banished the leaders of the constitutional party to lonely and distant cells, where they had ample leisure to repent of their imprudence.[2]

The constitutional struggle which was going on within the House does not seem to have impaired in any way the

[1] "Gesta," i. 247-53. [2] *Ibid.* 252-3.

excellence of discipline. The Rule was maintained in most exemplary fashion all through John's reign, and much care was devoted to its accurate observance. Regulations more stringent even than heretofore were passed for the performance of Divine service; the misericordes, or night-cups, taken in lieu of food when supper was not eaten, were abolished, for fear that the practice might be abused at some period when the standard of discipline was not so high. In this fashion, under the careful eye of Abbot John, the fame of the House grew greater and greater in the land. And along with growing reputation, there came a tendency for the convent to increase to unheard-of numbers. The average of brethren had hitherto been about fifty, and at this figure it was, generally speaking, to remain. But during John's time the influx was so great that he was compelled to make a rule that the number of brethren was not to exceed one hundred. The only exceptions were to be made in favour of candidates whom it would be "inconvenient" to refuse, either on account of their personal importance, or because they had been supported by the recommendation of some powerful man.[1] The fact that admission to the Abbey was so much coveted serves to confirm the tradition that in the early thirteenth century it enjoyed a great reputation as a home of sanctity and learning. The clause relative to the "interference of some powerful man" is significant. In the disturbed condition of the country at this time, it was a matter of the greatest importance to propitiate anyone who possessed political influence. The rule of John of the Cell embraced the most critical years of his namesake, John of England; and times were ill for a peaceful scholar. The Abbot had to struggle hard against the aggression of powerful persons who took advantage of the general disorder to seize by violence the property of those less influential than themselves. Among the most formidable of these antagonists was the notorious Robert FitzWalter, who, unfortunately for the House, was patron of the cell of Binham. Without any justification, if the Abbey story may be believed, he claimed

[1] "Gesta," i. 234.

Northaw Wood in 1201.[1] Doubtless he hoped that the House would not dare to dispute his claim, but even under the rule of the peaceful John, St. Albans was too powerful to be overawed by the mere prospect of a conflict. The Abbot, moreover, was not without competent assistance. In addition to its two principal men of affairs, the Prior and the Cellarer, the House now possessed a third important officer, the Seneschal, who is mentioned for the first time in connection with this particular dispute. The duty of the Seneschal, always a layman, generally of high birth, was nominally that of presiding over the court of the liberty; but in reality his most important task was to represent the interests of the House in politics and at Court: to see that it was not damaged in property or in reputation by the intrigues of those who found themselves in collision with its secular interests. William of Sisseverne, who held the office during the rule of John, was of the greatest assistance to the Abbot. With his help FitzWalter was stoutly resisted, and finally vanquished after an appeal to law. But the danger was not over; Robert, nothing daunted, pursued his schemes in more subtle fashion. Having gained over a monk named William "Pygun" or Pigeon, he succeeded in getting sealed with the conventual seal a charter forged in his own interests. By chance the fraud was discovered just in time, and the danger attending a too-negligent custody of the seal was brought home to every one at St. Albans. The treacherous brother was banished to Tynemouth, where he met with an accidental death under circumstances of such peculiar horror[2] that FitzWalter was scared into a momentary reconciliation with the House. But a fresh dispute broke out shortly afterwards—one of those dangerous quarrels into which the Abbey was led from time to time owing to the doubtful nature of the relations between the Abbot and the patrons of certain cells. At the moment, Binham was under the rule of a prior named Thomas, who was a friend of FitzWalter, and had, presumably, been ap-

[1] "Gesta," i. 221. "Annales Monastici," R.S., iii. 28.
[2] "Gesta," i. 225.

pointed through his influence. Abbot John did not trust the man, thinking that he was too intimate with FitzWalter to be a loyal member of the St. Albans congregation. Accordingly, he removed him: an action which was not only in accordance with his prescriptive rights over the cells, but which had recently been the subject of a special Papal privilege.[1] But FitzWalter chose to take the matter as a personal insult, and went to the length of besieging Binham, in order to force the inmates into agreeing that they would receive no prior except Thomas. The Abbot promptly appealed to the King, who, having his own reasons for disliking FitzWalter, took this opportunity of attacking him. A strong force was dispatched to the relief of Binham, and FitzWalter fled. In his absence his estates were confiscated by the angry King; and to this arbitrary action was due much of the feeling which united the baronial party in their opposition to John.

The dispute with FitzWalter was the most important of the Abbot's struggles. He did indeed become involved in a dispute which broke out between the Prior of Tynemouth and the Bishop of Durham; but the case, which concerned the rights of the Bishop over one of the Prior's churches, was settled without much trouble.[2] The affair is only noteworthy as being the precursor of many similar suits. The Abbey, as one of the six English[3] Benedictine Houses which enjoyed full rights of exemption from episcopal authority, was always trying to confer upon its churches, and even upon the churches of its cells, a share in its own privilege of shutting fast the door upon the local Bishop. In the case of churches situated within the archdeaconry of St. Albans,[4] which were often served by a member of the St. Albans congregation, it was generally possible to do this. But in the case of outlying

[1] "Gesta," i. 226. [2] "C.P.L.," 1205 (21).

[3] The others were Evesham, Westminster, Bury, Christchurch, and St. Augustine's, Canterbury. Cf. "Gesta," i. 393-4.

[4] The only English houses besides St. Albans which possessed their own archdeacons were Bury, Glastonbury, and Westminster. Cf. Phillimore, "Ecclesiastical Law," pp. 236 ff.

churches, especially churches belonging to the cells, the authority of the Bishop, although hotly disputed, had usually to be admitted in the end. Most of the lawsuits concerned with the Bishop's rights of induction and visitation ended, as we shall have occasion to notice from time to time, in a full acknowledgment of that right by the House, and in a formal compromise to save the dignity of both parties.

King John enjoyed the hospitality of the House many times in the course of his reign.[1] During the great dispute with FitzWalter, he had been a good friend to the House. This, however, was not his usual attitude. In the year 1208, when the country was laid under interdict, he sent a peremptory order to the Abbot bidding him celebrate Divine service as usual. The command was naturally disobeyed, whereupon John seized the House into his own hands, ejected the obedientiaries, and installed secular custodians of his own nomination.[2] The extortion and insolence of these latter was so intolerable that the Abbot, in despair at their excesses, offered the King 600 marks to withdraw them. The offer was promptly accepted, and the simple-minded Abbot was congratulating himself upon his successful diplomacy, when he received a summons to appear before the King's chief financial adviser, Richard Marsh. When he appeared, he was informed that he must at once pay another 500 marks, or the custody of the House would be resumed. Tears and entreaties were all in vain; and the Abbot, preferring to pay 1100 marks for freedom rather than 600 marks for nothing at all, managed somehow to find the money. As a result, the finances of the House were sadly crippled. It must have been with singular joy that the brethren of St. Albans witnessed the gathering at their gates of the 1213 assembly which was to assess the damage suffered by the clergy through the conduct of King John.[3] They themselves must have endured as much as any-

[1] "Chron. Maj.," ii. 456. Rot. Lit. Pat. R.C., "Itinerary of K. John".

[2] "Gesta," i. 235. "Chron. Maj.," ii. 564.

[3] "Chron. Maj.," ii. 564. For an explanation of the chronological difficulties of this account, see "E.H.R.," xx. 289.

one, and the choice of meeting-place must have seemed very appropriate.

Less than a year after this, in the summer of 1214, the Abbot fell sick, and it was clear that he could not live much longer. His last days were marked by a revival of the constitutional aspirations of the convent which he had long ruled so firmly. It was determined to take advantage of his failing health in order to extort some guarantee that in future no Abbot should rule in the same autocratic fashion. As he lay a-dying, a party of monks assembled round his couch, and took him severely to task for his custom of banishing to distant cells those who offended him. They then presented for his endorsement a charter, which, had he sealed it, would have bound himself and his successors to abstain in future from this method of enforcing discipline. But the Abbot, though weakened in body, was yet strong of will. He could not speak, but he signified by a gesture his emphatic refusal of a request so revolutionary. But the constitutionalists were not lightly to be put off: and despite the protests of certain moderate men, Alexander of Appleton, the Abbot's seal bearer, dared to affix the seal in defiance of his master's will. As had been confidently anticipated, the Abbot died shortly afterwards, on 17 July, 1214. The radical party in the convent did not hesitate to emperil even the cherished privilege of exemption in order to gain their own ends. Disregarding the warnings of Reimund, the old Prior, they presented the charter thus fraudulently extorted for the confirmation of the Archbishop of Canterbury, whose influence in matters affecting the internal order of the House was thus tacitly acknowledged. The other sharers in this daring scheme were William of Trumpington, Walter of Rheims, and Alexander of Langley.

On the death of John, two monks had been dispatched to find the King in Poitou, so that a *congé d'élire* might be obtained with as little delay as possible. The sooner the new Abbot could be elected, the sooner, of course, could the royal escheators be compelled to withdraw. But the King was in no hurry to abandon his prey: the custody of the Abbey

was extremely lucrative. Not until October could the desired permission be obtained. Meanwhile, active preparations were being made for the coming election. A certain Sir William of Trumpington attempted to secure the choice of his namesake, the Brother William whom we have already named as one of the leaders of the radical party, by persuading the King to announce that he would receive no other candidate. We are told that all this was done without the consent of Brother William—a statement which does not look very probable on the face of it—but in any case, the result was to make his election inevitable. The actual choice was made by the method technically known as compromise: that is to say, the convent bound itself to abide by the choice of a small committee, the members of which were not themselves eligible. On 20 November, 1214, William was formally elected, and ten days later received consecration from the Bishop of Ely.

It is interesting to compare this election with the other cases in which pressure had been brought to bear upon the convent to influence their choice. In the instance of Abbot Paul, as we have seen, there had been nomination pure and simple; Simon had been selected by Henry II on the report of the Bishop of London, as being the worthiest of the three chosen candidates. The election of William differed radically from both cases. The right of the convent to choose their own head was now so far vindicated that no direct pressure could be put upon them. None the less royal influence, so far from becoming less effectual, was now exercised in the most unfortunate manner, with a view to securing the election, not of the most suitable candidate, but of him on whose behalf interest had been made.

Such an election was to prove a fitting prelude to the stormy days which followed. As the world without was disturbed by constitutional crises, and alarmed by civil war, so in the microcosm of the Abbey sedition raged and passions ran high. The new Abbot soon showed that he had no intention of governing upon the lines which it had suited his purpose to advocate when he had been a simple monk. In consequence,

a party of opposition was speedily formed. Those members of the convent who had been his colleagues in the matter of the forged charter were deeply annoyed at his attitude. The whole situation, indeed, is precisely parallel to what was to happen in the College of Cardinals at the end of the fifteenth century. It was quite easy to obtain universal acceptance for constitutional limitations on the power of the Pontiff next to be elected; but in every case the man who happened to be chosen refused to be bound by his engagements, or to abide by the "liberal" proposals which he had put forward so zealously. Thus it was in the case of Abbot William. When he was reproved in Chapter for persisting in a course of action of which the convent disapproved, he showed that he was determined to maintain his authority in the old autocratic fashion. Two brethren who had made themselves prominent in their opposition to his authority found themselves suddenly banished to distant cells despite the protests of their fellows.[1] The next Chapter was a scene of furious excitement. The Abbot was bitterly reproached for being false to opinions which he had advocated in his early days. He did not lose either his temper or his courage, but replied to his accusers in a firm and temperate speech. He was determined, he said, not to be bound by agreements into which he had entered before he became aware of the duties attaching to his position. He would reserve the right of dealing with offenders in the way he considered best. This frank expression of opinion aroused such an uproar that the Abbot was compelled to bow to the storm, and to promise that he would reconsider the whole question. Secretly, however, he took measures to settle it once for all. The great Nicholas, Cardinal Bishop of Tusculum, happened to be staying at the House in the course of his negotiations with John on behalf of Innocent III, and by the Abbot's special prompting, announced his intention of being present in Chapter, a proceeding which, as he was a member of the Cistercian Order, was hardly usual. The opposition party, doubtless hoping to put a public affront upon the Abbot,

[1] "Gesta," i. 255-6.

reopened the whole matter in the presence of the Cardinal. Nicholas demanded to see the much-discussed charter, and it was accordingly given into his hands. As soon as he had glanced through it, he broke out into maledictions upon those who dared to deny their vow of obedience by relying upon so pernicious a document. To the horror of the constitutional party, he rent the parchment asunder with teeth and hands, and hurled the leaden seal into the midst of the dismayed monks. He then left the Chapter, assuring the Abbot that he would support him through thick and thin in his efforts to bring such an unruly flock to reason. As might be expected, William "factus de rege tyrannus" used his victory to compass the overthrow of all those who had attempted to set themselves up against him. One of the sufferers was poor old Prior Reimund who, though opposing the fraudulent sealing of the charter, had failed to lend Abbot William the support due from one of his high office. Of him the Abbot determined to make an example. The old man was degraded, deprived of the books and other small comforts in which he took delight, and banished to the bleak fastnesses of Tynemouth. Alexander of Langley, a member of the band with whom the Abbot had formerly been associated, was the next victim. He was made Prior of Wymondham, and forced to betake himself to that small and remote cell. But he behaved so curiously in his new position that the Abbot had perforce to recall him, and to appoint a man more efficient in place of him. In a little while, it was clear that Alexander's mind had become deranged from excessive study, and at last he grew violently insane. The treatment to which he was subjected would be considered somewhat over-rigorous in these modern days, but the thirteenth century had its own views as to the proper method of dealing with such cases. He was first scourged "to the copious effusion of blood," and as his mental condition showed no signs of improvement, he was sent in fetters to Binham, where, still in fetters, he shortly afterwards died and was buried.[1]

[1] "Gesta," i. 260, 266.

The firmness of the Abbot soon began to produce its effect. All was peace within the House. But now formidable dangers threatened from without. The situation of the Abbey was such as to expose it to much risk when the country was in a disturbed condition. This was abundantly clear during the years 1215-17, when Louis of France was endeavouring to enforce his claim to the English throne. As far as its own opinion was concerned, the House seems to have from the first inclined to the royalist party, even when that party was headed by John; but the general attitude of indignation manifested by St. Albans writers against both parties is due to the fact that the House was plundered impartially by each. Perhaps the time of greatest danger was in December, 1216, when Prince Louis occupied the town. On the 21st of the month he made himself master of St. Albans, and peremptorily ordered the Abbot to do him homage. William refused, respectfully but firmly; whereupon Louis in high indignation threatened to fire town and Abbey together. He finally allowed himself to be pacified by a gift of 80 marks.[1] But no sooner had the Abbot made terms with one party, than he was at once exposed to the attacks of the other. Four weeks later, in the early morning of 22 January, 1217, Falkes de Bréauté came to St. Albans with a large force, sacked the town with the thoroughness that characterized his operations, and proceeded to extort £100 from the Abbot by threatening to fire the church.[2] He then retired in triumph. But curiously enough, the fact that he had in the course of his raid violated sanctuary preyed upon his mind, and being seized with a sudden fit of remorse, in which a terrifying nightmare played no small part, he repented, and suffered discipline at the hands of the brethren. But he omitted to restore any of the plunder, which caused some doubts as to the sincerity of his repentance. To raids of this kind the Abbey was frequently subjected; and its outlying possessions had often to be ransomed for large sums to save them from des-

[1] "Chron. Maj.," iii. 8. "Gesta," i. 259.
[2] "Chron. Maj.," iii. 12. "Gesta," i. 267-8.

truction.[1] Matthew Paris goes so far as to estimate the sums paid out at more than £2500. This must certainly be in excess of the true figure, for the total income of the House from its estates was probably not more than £500 or £600 per annum.[2] But quite as serious as the monetary losses must have been the loss of live stock. To extort from the Abbey a large sum of money at the point of the sword was the prerogative of the great; but to drive off flocks and herds was within the power of comparatively insignificant persons. And there is nothing improbable in the statement that in a single twelvemonth the Abbot lost 100 horses.

In the light of all this extortion, it is surprising to hear that the time of William, so far from being a period of the limited activities usually associated with pecuniary difficulties, was characterized by the greatest energy of building. The two aisles of the church were re-roofed and girded with oaken beams. The tower was heightened and repaired, and its tall spire was covered with lead in such a way as to emphasize its octagonal form. The west front, begun by John of the Cell, was at last completed; the stonework of the windows in the church was put in thorough repair, and the windows themselves were reglazed. Four cloisters were constructed in different places to afford shelter to brethren passing from one part of the house to another. Nor was this all. Much excellent wood-carving was done by another of these artists in which St. Albans ever seemed to abound—Walter of Colchester, presumably a younger member of the family which had executed the mural paintings during the reign of the late abbot. Among other things, Walter set up an elaborately carved pulpit in the choir, constructed a "glorious" image of the Virgin, and carved with wonderful skill the histories of SS. Alban and Amphibalus upon a beam over the high altar. While all this artistic activity was going on around him, the Abbot's

[1] Rickmansworth cost the House 60 marks; Berkhamstead £100; Watford £100 on one occasion, 100 marks on another, and 80 marks on a third; Sandridge 13 marks; Winslow 14 marks; Walden 100s.; in addition to these exactions, "innumerable" tallages and tenseries had to be paid. "Gesta," i. 296-8.

[2] Below, p. 121.

energies were mainly directed towards more practical issues. He purchased a hostel in London for the benefit of members of the convent who resorted to the capital on business, and he greatly increased the value of the property by building houses upon portions of the land which it included. He also purchased a house at Yarmouth, in which salt fish might be stored in bulk whenever variations in the market price made it profitable to buy in larger quantities than usual. From these and like instances, it becomes apparent that William was a prudent and successful administrator; but the precise manner in which he obtained the money necessary for his manifold operations is not quite so clear. In 1223 he attempted to levy a tax upon his cells, but in the case of St. Mary des Prez, at all events, the attempt proved a failure. The nuns complained to the Pope, and the Abbot was forbidden to lay any burden upon them under colour of his right of patronage.[1] Six years afterwards he adopted another plan; he sent nuntii all over the country to proclaim the dilapidated condition of the fabric and to invoke the contributions of the pious.[2] Even this did not produce the desired effect, for in the next year, William was compelled to obtain *litteræ deprecatoriæ* from the King, bidding the tenants of Abbey estates contribute towards the debts of their lord.[3] That the Abbot should have been compelled to resort to these expedients show that his ordinary revenue was insufficient for his needs; that he was able to bring his many enterprises to a successful conclusion shows that his policy was well considered. It should, moreover, be remembered that during the minority of Henry III, something like a wave of religious enthusiasm swept over England. The coming of the friars in 1220 and 1224 were among the factors which turned men's minds to piety and good works. Hence, it may be assumed that the shrines of SS. Alban and Amphibalus did not lack for offerings. Further, the hospitality of the House, always considerable, was now becoming a most important part of the activities. In 1234 Papal permission was obtained to devote additional resources to the upkeep of

[1] "C.P.L.," 1223 (90). [2] "C.P.R.," 1229 (252). [3] *Ibid.* 1229 (273).

the guest-chamber.[1] And while poorer guests were entertained free of charge, it was generally understood that the wealthy were expected to make St. Alban some present. The multiplication of wealthy guests must have constituted no small source of profit. It is probably these considerations, quite as much as the novel financial expedient of the Abbot, which account for the outburst of artistic production so soon after the disastrous years of civil war.

Be this as it may, the House flourished exceedingly under the prudent rule of Abbot William. The number of the brethren increased so much that a supplementary dormitory had to be built above the chapel of St. Cuthbert, in order to relieve the over-crowding of the main dortoir. Doubtless the influx of novices was due to the fame of the St. Albans discipline. The Abbot, thoroughly master within the House, was able to restore the rule to its original purity, and to raise the discipline to a rare perfection. He withdrew certain of the relaxations which had been permitted by Abbot Warin, and he made some changes in ritual which show that the standard of performance of Divine service was becoming increasingly high. The most important of these changes was the introduction of Lady Mass which had to be celebrated *ad notam* every day. This care for decency and order was accompanied by renewed activity in the sphere of learning. The Abbot showed himself determined to preserve the best tradition of the House in this respect. He presented many books to the library, and spent much pains upon the organization of the scriptorium, which in his day was inhabited by the first of the great historians whose names are the glory of the House to which they belong—Roger of Wendover. The circumstances amidst which the famous "Flores Historiarum" was composed are not without interest. The historian first comes under observation in connection with a thorough visitation of the cells which was held by Abbot William in 1230-1.[2] While he was inquiring into the condition of the houses de-

[1] "C.P.L.," 1234 (138).

[2] "Gesta," i. 270. Duffus Hardy, "Materials," III, xxxv.

pendent upon St. Albans, he came upon serious complaints against the conduct of the Prior of Belvoir, who had neglected his House, and allowed the property to deteriorate. This prior was none other than Roger himself. Some time in 1231 he was recalled to St. Albans in disgrace. Having retired from all share in the business activities for which he was so ill fitted, he embarked upon the literary work which occupied him until his death in 1236. So far as the "Flores" itself is concerned, it is at once evident, as well from the nature of the treatise as from the short space of time which the date of the author's death allowed for the composition of a work so lengthy, that Roger made great use of earlier historians of the House, particularly, perhaps, of Abbot John of the Cell. Roger's work, in fact, bears all the marks of being a revised and amplified edition of the St. Albans historical writing which in its origin probably went back to the "Rotulus" of Adam the Cellarer.[1] And had it not been that the fame of Roger was eclipsed by that of his illustrious pupil Matthew Paris, the great merits of the "Flores" could not have failed to secure for it the celebrity which it deserves. The production of a work so elaborate, so careful, and so trustworthy withall, says much for the standard of culture at St. Albans under the rule of William.

It was during the rule of William that a most important change took place in the relations between St. Albans and the Curia. Hitherto, the Popes had appeared in the light of distant but powerful protectors, whose aid could be invoked when the privileges of the House were in danger. But from the time of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, the Popes are regarded rather as oppressive masters, whose only interest in the Abbey is to turn to account their patronage of it. This arose directly from the Canon of that Council which ordered the heads of exempt houses to present themselves in person at Rome for confirmation after their election.[2] In the case of St. Albans, which was far away from Rome, which had heavy expenses, moderate resources, and a great position to main-

[1] Above, p. 77. [2] Potthast, "Regesta," i. 437.

tain, this Canon caused not merely inconvenience but distress. When each abbot-elect was compelled to journey to Rome to pay the fees exacted by a host of greedy officials, and to maintain throughout a long and expensive voyage, the state befitting the Abbot of the premier Benedictine House of England, it is not surprising to find that the Popes came to be regarded as the worst enemies of the financial well-being of St. Albans.

This was not the only provision of the Fourth Lateran Council which was destined to exercise a far-reaching influence upon the subsequent history of St. Albans. In 1215 it was further ordained that the Benedictine Order, which had hitherto been exempt from the necessity of constituting itself into provincial synods, should now proceed to organize common Chapters in each province. The meetings were to be triennial.[1] In England, two such Chapters were formed, one for York and one for Canterbury. To the latter belonged St. Albans. The meetings of these Chapters arranged for the appointment of Visitors to inspect even the exempt houses, so that St. Albans found itself compelled to allow to the representatives of the Chapter the functions which it had for so long withheld from the Bishop. But the machinery of the system was not very efficient. The executive was in the hands of elected presidents, who were assisted by committees of diffinitores, and the division of authority between the two was carried much too far. It was difficult to secure any continuity of policy from Chapter to Chapter: it was impossible to secure such continuity from visitation to visitation. And it was the reasoned judgment of so weighty an authority as Matthew Paris that the system was objectionable on account of the diversity of custom and consequent confusion which was introduced even into the best regulated Houses.[2] It cannot, however, be denied that these periodic inspections did much

[1] Potthast, loc. cit.

[2] "Chron. Maj.," iii. 235. Visitation Articles, "Ann. Mon.," R.S., ii. 484. Cf. G. C. Coulton in "E.H.R.," January, 1914. Miss R. Graham, *ibid.*, October, 1912.

to maintain the standard of discipline among the English Houses. The Visitors were commonly members of other and rival communities: a fact which fostered a spirit of emulation working powerfully against indolence and sloth.

But if St. Albans was compelled to submit to the supervision of the governing body of the Order, it relaxed not one whit of its determination to keep its privileges unviolated by the Bishop. Both of the two great lawsuits for which the rule of William is noteworthy arose from the attempt of the House to withdraw out-lying cells from the authority of the diocesan. In the first case the antagonist was the Bishop of Lincoln, who, in virtue of his claims to jurisdiction, was the traditional enemy of St. Albans. In 1219 he put forward a claim to plenary jurisdiction over the Church of Luton, and certain other churches possessed by the Abbey. His claim included custody during vacancy, and full powers of jurisdiction over the priors of the cells within his diocese. His claim was stoutly resisted, and after the matter had been discussed by a Commission appointed by Pope Honorius III, a compromise was arranged which saved the dignity of both parties. The Bishop was to have the right of receiving and confirming in their position the priors and vicars presented to him by the St. Albans authorities. On the other hand, the Abbot, and not the Bishop, was to have the cure of souls of all monks resident in the cells, and was to have power to appoint and remove them without the interposition of episcopal authority.[1] So for the moment the matter ended. It is to be noted that William took advantage of the negotiations rendered necessary by this suit to obtain from the Curia a full confirmation of all the privileges and possessions of the House.[2]

The second case, which came up for settlement nine years later, bore a strong resemblance to the first. It arose out of a dispute between the Bishop of Norwich and the Priors of

[1] "Gesta," i. 275-7.

[2] "C.P.L.," 1219 (63). The possessions enumerated include the churches of St. Albans, Kingsbury, Watford, Rickmansworth, Langley, Redburn, Codicote, Walden, Hexton, Norton, Newnham, Winslow, Eston, Barnet, Shephall, Tinghurst, Brantsfield, Stanmore.

Binham and Wymondham. The Bishop desired to compel the priors to attend his provincial synod, and claimed full diocesan rights over the churches in their presentation. Again the matter was arranged by compromise, although the victory really lay with the Bishop, who vindicated his claim to visit the churches, to institute the vicars, and to compel the attendance of the priors. The only concessions to the prejudice of St. Albans were the preservation of all the financial rights of the cells over their dependent churches, and the permission given to the priors to take their seats in the synod without changing their travelling dress, as a sign of their personal exemption from the episcopal jurisdiction.[1]

The last years of William were uneventful. The country was quiet, and no opposition was offered to his authority either within or without the House. In 1234 he was plainly growing feeble, and towards the end of the year he was seized with mortal sickness. At the beginning of the new year, on 24 February, 1235, he died peacefully. Four days later a *congé* was sought and obtained by a deputation consisting of Robert the Kitchener, Richard the Cellarer, and Brother Robert of Weston.[2] To the great satisfaction of the convent, Henry III allowed them, for a consideration of 300 marks, to retain the custody of the House in their own hands, saving only the escheats and the presentations to the churches which fell vacant. The Abbey was thus spared the irksome presence of the royal officials, and could deliberate in calm as to the choice of their new superior.

On the day appointed for the election, the priors of the dependent cells rode in, and a general Chapter of the St. Albans congregation was held, in which Prior John, of the cell of Hertford, was duly elected. He was the second man to be elected Abbot of St. Albans while holding the position of head of a cell of the House. So old was he, that he was too infirm to undertake the journey to Rome which had now become requisite. Accordingly, he sent envoys to Rome to

[1] "Gesta," i. 278-9. Bodl. MS. Tanner 137, fol. 137*b*.

[2] "C.P.R.," 1235 (95).

obtain Papal confirmation, not without dire forebodings as to the cost of adopting such an expedient. The messengers succeeded in bringing the business to a conclusion without the presence of the Abbot, but the expenses were even greater than had been anticipated, and they returned home full of loud complaints against the greed and venality of the Roman officials. On 1 April[1] the Pope had been informed of the King's consent to the election of John; but not until 18 August[2] was the long process completed by the royal letter commanding the tenants of St. Alban to render obedience to the Abbot as to their rightful lord.[3]

Despite his age, John showed himself a vigorous administrator, as well as a worthy successor to William in his care of the fabric. He built a larger guest-hall than ever, with noble chambers opening out of it for the accommodation of the royal household. It is plain that the improvement had become necessary owing to the ever-increasing calls upon the hospitality of the House; and it is to be noted that the King and other important persons contributed to the expense of the new structure as though to a work in which every one had an interest.[4] Abbot John also built comfortable quarters opposite the Great Gate for the accommodation of his servants, and gave universal satisfaction by building a new buttery for the convent. He placed this on the footing of a separate establishment, distinct from the Abbot's buttery. The object of this step was to secure the greater efficiency of both departments. Complaints against the buttery had been frequent of late, particularly with regard to the Abbey beer, the weakness of which had become a byword and a reproach.[5] The mills next demanded John's attention. They had become dilapidated with age, and the feeble force of the River Ver was no longer sufficient to grind all the corn required by the House. Accordingly, the Abbot set up a horse-mill near the brewery, at the foot of the slope to the south of the House. This, when

[1] "Gesta," i. 309. [2] "C.P.R.," 1235 (98). [3] "Gesta," i. 519-20.
[4] "C.C.R.," 1242 (413). [5] "Gesta," i. 395; *ibid.* 323.

supplemented by a new windmill at Stanmore, proved sufficient to relieve the water-mills of their excessive burden.

Abbot John of Hertford was chiefly remarkable as a formidable and tireless defender of the rights of the House. He was the first, though not by any means the last, Abbot who deserves to be called litigious. From one point of view, his reign may reasonably be regarded as a single, vast, protracted lawsuit, now with this adversary, now with that, as one point after another of his precious liberties appeared to him to be suffering prejudice. Of these disputes one of the most troublesome arose out of the new privilege of free warren throughout the demesne, which had been acquired with great effort in 1248.[1]

Some of the military tenants were naturally aggrieved, and in 1253 one of them, a certain Geoffrey of Childwick, presumed to "enter violently" the Abbot's warren by hunting on his own land without asking permission. John at once took action: but the offender was stout of heart, and possessed such powerful friends that it was difficult to get justice against him. To the enormous indignation of the St. Albans authorities, Geoffrey obtained a charter from the King giving him the right of hunting upon his own lands. The Abbot, relying upon his own privilege, took measures to restrain his tenant by force. Whereupon Geoffrey in great joy sued the Abbot, who suddenly found himself in misericordia and condemned to an amercement of fifty marks.[2] Geoffrey followed up his victory with skill and vigour, so that the Abbot, doubtless cursing the day when he had first meddled with his formidable tenant, was fain to grant him a corrody and the life tenure of an Abbey estate in Newbury so that he might be quit of him. It was fortunate indeed for John that he had not many adversaries so formidable and so determined as Geoffrey.

In a suit of much greater importance the Abbot's victory was complete. The circumstances are of some interest, as showing the tendency of the royal officials to take every

[1] "C.Ch.R.," 1248 (330). [2] Nero D i. fol. 121*b*.

opportunity of encroaching upon the privileges of franchise-holders. In the course of the year 1253-4, while the King was in Gascony, the Queen and the Earl of Cornwall sent justices round the country to inquire into the cases of persons accused of changing old coinage for new, contrary to the recently published royal edict.[1] The Seneschal of St. Alban's liberty duly appeared to meet the justices, and the names of offenders were enrolled. Next year came the justices to hold the assizes and collect the fines. Ignoring the privileges of the House, they summoned two men and the reeve from each vill within the liberty to come to a place outside its limits in order to assess the amercements of the guilty parties. The men refused to obey the order, as being contrary to the privileges of St. Alban, whereupon a fine of £100 was laid upon them. William of Horton, the Cellarer, complained that St. Alban had been prejudiced in five ways :—

1. Men of the liberty could not be compelled to go outside the liberty to answer for their offences.

2. The men amerced had not been duly summoned, since the bailiff of the liberty had had no return of writ, as was his right.

3. No sufficient notice of the intentions of the justices had been given.

4. If amercements were levied at all upon men within the liberty, or upon men of the liberty, such amercements belonged to the Abbot, and to no one else.

5. The amount of the fine was out of all proportion to the offence.[2]

In April, 1254, the case came up for settlement, and the Abbot won all along the line. The obnoxious amercement was entirely remitted, and a special justice was appointed to make inquiries into the offences against the royal order which had taken place within the liberty.[3]

In addition to these important cases, Abbot John entered upon many suits which are not of sufficient interest to repay

[1] "C.P.R.," 1254 (377). Cf. Madox, "Exchequer," i. 759-62.
[2] "Gesta," i. 339-40. [3] "C.P.R.," 1254 (677).

detailed investigation. Among his adversaries are mentioned the Bishop of Durham, the Abbot of Westminster, and the Archdeacon of Norwich.

It would be a mistake to suppose that Abbot John was merely concerned to defend the rights already possessed by his House: he was also at pains to add to their number. With great triumph the historian of his reign relates how, by his request, the priors of cells were wholly exempted from the jurisdiction of the local authorities, and allowed to share freely in the privileges of the Mother House: how the churches appropriated to the use of the Abbey and of its cells were exempted from the jurisdiction of the Bishop in whose diocese they lay: and how Abbey and cells alike were relieved from the necessity of pleading before anyone of less importance than a legate to answer in any way at all for their conduct. Many other smaller privileges were gained through the energy of John.[1] Indeed, it might also be said that the period covered by his reign, the central years of the thirteenth century, represent the high-water mark of the privileges of St. Albans, as of other exempt Houses in England. At no subsequent time were these liberties enjoyed so fully, and with so little hindrance from episcopal authority. And in this connection it should be remarked that the reign of John witnessed a well-planned but ineffectual attempt at alliance for mutual protection on the part of five of the great exempt Houses of England—St. Alban's, St. Edmund's, St. Peter's, St. Augustine's (Canterbury) and Evesham. The principal object of this league, according to the proposals dated October, 1253, was to be the maintenance of privileges, especially the privilege of exemption. If one House found itself menaced, it could call upon the others for assistance, and could enjoy the advantage of their joint resources. If one member suffered serious damage through fire or through any other accident, the remaining members were to succour the distressed community according to their resources. It was further proposed that in case of emergency there should be a common council to direct the

[1] "Gesta," i. 350-4.

policy of the combined Houses, and on this council the verdict of the majority was to be final.[1] But the scheme was too elaborate; it did not take into account the jealousy and suspicion of the proposed members. Each House was secretly afraid that the others would combine to its damage, and nothing could overcome the obstacles thus arising. If the scheme had succeeded, the whole history of English Benedictinism might have been different. The immense resources controlled by such a combination might have created a force capable of meeting and overcoming the attacks of the Bishops upon the exempted Houses during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

The transaction of his many lawsuits and the acquisition of his new privileges must have involved Abbot John in heavy expenses. But by far the most serious drain upon his resources was the necessity of contributing heavily to the revenues of King and of Pope. Royal taxation was grievous, and of frequent occurrence, in addition to which the *servitium debitum* of six knights had to be performed some half-dozen times in the course of John's rule.[2] And the Pope, far from being a refuge from the rapacity of the King, was the principal agent in the exploitation of England for the benefit of himself and of Henry III. Every two or three years came demands for tenths and fifteenths, varied occasionally by such elaborate extortion as the Norwich taxation of 1255, when a tenth towards the Crusade had to be paid for five successive years.[3] Nor was the regular incidence of royal taxation, accompanied by the occasional instance of Papal taxation, all that the House had to endure; a lump sum was sometimes demanded by the Government, and this had to be paid lest worse things should befall. In May, 1254, for example, a sum of £100 was thus wrung from the House.[4] A more subtle form of extortion was that practised between 1255 and 1257, when the King,

[1] "Gesta," i. 392-4.

[2] "C.C.R.," 1231, 1235, 1237, 1241, 1253, 1256, 1258. Cf. Nero D i. ff. 133*b*, 171*b*.

[3] Nero D i. fol. 125*b*.

[4] *Ibid.* fol. 71.

having failed first in his attempt to raise money from the magnates, and next in his project of persuading the great houses to pledge their credit for large sums, obtained Papal letters to the prelates of England, ordering them to pay heavy interest upon sums of money which they had never borrowed. On this occasion John lost patience, and made a stout fight as premier Benedictine Abbot in the country. But his resistance was in vain. The privileges upon which he relied were relaxed for this occasion by special letter,[1] the House was ordered to pay 500 marks, and placed under interdict for its failure to find the requisite sum. This is a good example of the way in which Pope and King played into each other's hands when engaged in extorting money from the English clergy.

Taking all these expenses into consideration, it is hardly surprising to find that Abbot John was compelled on some three or four occasions to levy an aid upon his tenants, and also to impropriate three churches that he might be able to make his revenue keep pace with his expenditure.[2] From time to time the convent had to step in, and out of their separate income assist the Abbot to pay off the more pressing of his creditors.[3] That the House was not reduced to bankruptcy says much for the adequacy of its resources at this time; but there can be no doubt that it was very hard hit by the burdens laid upon it. A Papal letter of January, 1257, which allows the Abbey to impropriate certain churches, gives as its reason the "manifest debt and dilapidation of the House".[4] Nor was it possible to obtain much help from the cells. One of them, at any rate, St. Mary des Prez, was so dilapidated in 1256 that Pope Alexander IV was fain to issue indulgences to all who went to visit the place.[5] And yet, despite the complaints of poverty which occur so frequently in letters to Pope and King—complaints which are obviously grounded on fact—the state maintained by Abbot John was very great. Indeed, he rather resembles a temporal lord of high degree than the senior

[1] Nero D i. fol. 159. "Gesta," i. 385.
[2] "C.P.R.," 1253 (230), etc. "C.P.L.," 1252 (281), 1257 (343).
[3] "Gesta," i. 370. [4] "C.P.L.," 1257 (343). [5] Rymer, i. 351, 352.

English member of an Order which was bidden to hold property in suspicion. He was the first head of his House to take his daily commons into his own lodgings, where he dined in state apart from the brethren. After the ordinary custom of a great noble, he entertained a large number of pages of noble birth, who had been entrusted to his care that they might be instructed in the manners and customs of polite society.[1] Nor is this the only indication of the growing importance of what may be called the social side of the activities of the Abbey. The guests who sought shelter and entertainment grew ever more numerous, and the demands they made upon the resources of the House showed no tendency to diminish. St. Albans, in short, was no longer a place of quiet, a retreat from the cares of the world. It was now a scene of bustling activity, a House of princely entertainment where the greatest in the land thought it no shame to harbour.

As might be expected, the time when St. Albans was most closely in touch with the full stream of English life is the very moment when its own literary activities attained to the heights of fame. The intellectual condition of the Abbey during the reign of John may be estimated from the fact that the scriptorium was under the direction of Matthew Paris : a writer who displays, in addition to the highest natural gifts, the mature fruit of long and careful training under the most competent direction. He it was who finally reared the edifice of historical composition for which the materials had in past times been gathered by Cellarer Adam, by Brother Walter, by Abbot John, and by Prior Roger, and his name to-day remains the principal glory of the House for which he laboured. Entering the monastery in 1217 Matthew appears to have become Roger's assistant, acquiring in these early years the characteristic, un-English handwriting which distinguishes the production of the St. Albans' scriptorium during the early and middle thirteenth century.[2] After the death of Roger, Matthew took up his master's labours, but in a fashion which differed

[1] "Gesta," i. 397; *ibid.* 396.

[2] Duffus Hardy, "Materials," III, xxv., xxxiv., cxxiii.

not only from that which had produced the "Flores," but from that which any English chronicler had previously employed. Taking advantage of the situation of his House, placed as it was upon the highway along which rode merchants and travellers from all European countries, Paris embodied in his work the gossip, not only of England, but of all the civilized world. Moreover, the Rule of Stability being somewhat relaxed at this time, the chronicler himself was a considerable traveller, and like Froissart in the fourteenth century moved from place to place gathering material and seeing things with his own eyes. Men of the highest rank were glad to tell the St. Albans' historian particulars of the events in which they had been concerned, and to ask for favourable notice in his writings. They were not deceived. His vigorous and picturesque style: his quick eye for literary effect, combined with a rare skill in portraiture, place him in a rank above the ordinary chronicler, and his work lives still. He spent the years 1236-59 in continuous literary activities, interrupted only by his journeys in quest of new material. The greatest of his works is certainly "Chronica Majora," which embodies in an embellished form all the historical composition which had been going on before his time in the St. Albans' scriptorium. The history of the book has been fully discussed by Dr. Luard in the prefaces to his monumental edition in the Rolls Series, and it is sufficient here to note that up to the year 1235 it consists of the joint compilation of previous writers, with copious insertions, corrections, and alterations; while from that date onwards to the death of the author in 1259, the work is the sole composition of Paris himself. Of this great history Paris made an abbreviation called the "Historia Minor," beginning with the year 1067 and ending in 1253. Of more particular importance for the present purpose are his compilations dealing with the history of the House. The "Lives of the Two Offas" and the "Lives of Twenty-three Abbots of St. Albans" represent the final presentation in literary form of what tradition could relate concerning the foundation and early history of the House. It is from this time that the elaborate accounts of

the endowment of St. Albans, of its wonderful privileges, and of its early fame, must be held to date. And although Paris' works remain the principal source of knowledge for the early history of the Abbey, yet it is scarcely paradoxical to say that his literary skill presents the chief obstacle to the elucidation of that history. The thread of tradition is so interwoven with a gorgeous fabric of fiction, that the task of discriminating the one from the other is often extremely difficult. Both these minor works of Paris, it should be noticed, occur at the beginning of the valuable Cottonian MS. Nero D i., to which reference has already been made in the early chapters of this study. The volume was used by the historian as a commonplace book. In it he embodied curious and interesting facts for which he could find no room in the "Chronica Majora". Through the survival of this MS. there have been preserved many of the Abbey muniments—too often in their thirteenth-century dress—as well as an illustrated catalogue of the jewels owned by the House. Among its other contents may be mentioned certain documents of importance for the financial history of the House,[1] and a long worthless list of the privileges said to have been conferred upon it by particular popes and kings.

In the midst of all this activity, the reign of John came to a close. He died on 19 April, 1263,[2] apparently of sheer old age. His intense energy and vigour had greatly impressed his own time, and at the end of the fourteenth century, when the history of his reign received its final touches, he was ranked among the model Abbots of the House. As it happens, there is no real break between his reign and that of his successor, who was a man of very similar disposition.

The period of vacancy did not last long. It was marked by the usual visit from the escheator, whose stay, however, was cut short by a royal mandate, dated 23 April, allowing the convent to retain the custody of the House in their own hands.

[1] See next chapter.

[2] Not 1260, as Riley gathers from the error in "Gesta," i. 391.

As the sum of £600 had to be paid for the privilege, the King was hardly a loser.[1]

The community then proceeded to the election of a new head, and as a result of the common form of election by compromise, Brother Roger of Norton was duly chosen. Like his predecessor, he was an elderly man at the time of his election, and he too presented himself at the Curia by proxy. The confirmation was obtained after the usual expense and trouble, on 9 September, 1263; and at the same time Papal letters were directed to the vassals of the Abbey, ordering them to receive the Abbot as their spiritual father.[2] But not until 21 December were the long formalities finally concluded by the royal order for the restitution of the Abbot's belongings.[3]

The rule of Roger is principally remarkable for the appearance, in an exaggerated form, of that litigiousness which comes to the front in the time of the late Abbot. Very noteworthy is the hostility manifested by the writers of St. Albans against the world outside their gates. They seem to be in a perpetual condition of apprehension lest the Saint should be defrauded of his dues, or should suffer prejudice in his privileges. The reason for this is not far to seek. The privileges obtained by Abbot John of Hertford had set the coping-stone upon the edifice of immunity which had been rearing itself for the last two centuries. The liberties of the House were now so extensive: they interfered with the comfort or convenience of so many persons, that they were frequently infringed. The height to which the privileges of the House had attained is well illustrated by an incident which occurred towards the end of Roger's rule. The Abbot and convent claimed that from time immemorial the steward of the liberty, with his clerk, had discharged the office of coroner within the boundaries of the franchise. Now the manner in which this important function was discharged did not strike Edward I as adequate,

[1] "C.P.R.," 1263 (256).

[2] "C.P.L.," 1263 (386, 393). Cf. Hardy's "Syllabus of Rymer," 9 September, 1263.

[3] "C.P.R.," 1263 (304).

and in 1280 the liberty was for a moment taken into the King's hands, while Abbot and convent were condemned to an amercement for the insufficient discharge of the duties pertaining to the office of coroner. But the sequel is remarkable. Not only was the privilege of the House recognized in the fullest manner, but the amercement was pardoned, and the Abbot was given the right of choosing his own coroners, without royal writ, from among the more substantial of his tenants.[1] Considering that the Abbot enjoyed all the fines taken from men of the liberty, or from men in the liberty, even by royal justices, it seems plain that the more efficient execution of the office of coroner must have been attended by not a little additional profit. How the tenants enjoyed discharging the troublesome and responsible office of coroner for the Abbot's profit, we are not told. But it is hardly likely that the liberties of the House would be disturbed by the discontent of a few tenants, when they had emerged triumphant from the great Quo Warranto inquest of 1278.

The natural consequence of the acquisition of liberties so extensive was the necessity of defending them vigilantly, and Roger never hesitated to embark upon a lawsuit when he considered his position threatened. The first of the important disputes in which he found himself involved arose, like the dangerous dispute between John of the Cell and Robert Fitz-Walter, out of the ambiguous relations existing between the Abbot of St. Albans and the patrons of those cells whose founders had reserved for themselves certain rights. As in the previous case, the matter turned upon the appointment of a prior. The patron of the cell of Wymondham, when the place fell vacant in 1264, was the Countess of Arundel, who was disposed to take a somewhat lofty view of her rights in the selection of the next prior. The Abbot did not admit her claims, and the case went to Rome. In the end, however, she thought it better to acknowledge the strength of the Abbot's contentions: the case was withdrawn from the Curia, and at last the usual compromise was reached which safeguarded the

[1] "C.P.R.," 1280 (378).

dignity of both parties without laying down any conclusions which might prevent a similar dispute in the future.[1] More vital to the interest of the House were the suits entered upon in protection of the precious right of exemption, which was attacked by two Primates in succession. The first conflict took place in 1277 when Archbishop Kilwardby held a council at Wycombe to inquire into the right of St. Albans to impropriate churches over which they did not exercise pontificalia. The proctors of the Abbot displayed privileges exempting them from answering before any person of less consequence than a *legatus a latere*, declaring at the same time that they were forbidden to plead before a mere Archbishop without the express permission of the Holy See.[2] It was all in vain. The Primate was implacable, and proceeded first to declare the proctors contumacious, and then to excommunicate them. However, when his first natural impulse of impatience was over, Kilwardby recognized that he was in the wrong. Abbot Roger tactfully met him half-way: arranged for an interview, and behaved with such charming deference that the Archbishop's heart was completely won. The dispute ended in the most amicable of settlements; the dignity of the Primate was saved, and the privileges of the House were safeguarded. The second dispute broke out some four years later, in 1281, between Abbot Roger and Kilwardby's successor, Patcham. The Archbishop summoned a council of exempt and non-exempt abbots to meet at Lambeth. Roger, among others, refused to attend, and Patcham ordered some churches belonging to the House to be seized. Again, however, there was a mutual unwillingness to push matters to extremes, and neither party manifested the slightest desire to put money into the purses of the Italian pleaders by carrying the case to Rome. The affair was compromised "without prejudice to the rights of either party," that is to say, leaving matters as they were before, but restoring peace between Abbot and Primate.[3]

[1] Three monks were to be selected by the Countess's request from the convent of St. Albans, and the Abbot was to nominate one of them to the vacant dignity. "Gesta," i. 407.

[2] "Gesta," i. 432. [3] Rishanger, "Chronica," 96. "Gesta," i. 458.

The troubles of Roger were not confined to the lawsuits upon which he embarked in defence of his rights. The first few years of his rule were a period of great discontent, both political and social. The cloud of trouble which had been slowly gathering throughout the reign of Henry III was now thicker and more ominous than ever before, as the relations between the King and the leaders of the baronial party grew ever more strained. As a consequence of its situation, the Abbey naturally displayed a keen interest in politics. In common with the rest of the English clergy, it had suffered so much from royal exactions that it inclined towards the side of De Montfort. The Abbot of St. Albans was among those summoned to the famous Parliament of 1265 ;[1] and the pages of William Rishanger, who succeeds Matthew Paris as historian of the House, are full of the praises of Earl Simon, and of condemnation, for the most part implied rather than expressed, of his opponents. The Abbot did not venture to disobey when his knights were summoned for service in the royal army ;[2] but Henry was not in ignorance of the real feeling harboured towards him at St. Albans. In February, 1266, after the fall of De Montfort and the ruin of those who trusted in him, the Abbot and convent were formally readmitted to the royal favour, and Henry was graciously pleased to signify to them by letters patent the laying aside of his royal indignation, conceived against them by reason of the late disturbances, and to forbid his officials to molest them further.[3] The disloyal feelings which the King had detected in the Abbey were shared to the full by the town of St. Albans, as is shown by the following incident. The place itself was so strongly fortified at the time that it was known as "Little London," and its defection was a serious matter[4] to the royalists. Accordingly the castellan of Hertford, a certain Gregory Stokes, determined in 1265 to arrest four of the leading burgesses, and to make them surety for the good behaviour of their fellows. Unfortunately he came to the town in a spirit of bravado,

[1] Rymer, i. 449. [2] Rishanger, op. cit. 41. [3] "C.P.R.," 1266 (559).
[4] "Gesta," i. 426. Rishanger, "Opus Chron.," 20 ; "Chronica," 38,

accompanied by three henchmen only. A chance remark, "Look ye how the wind sits here," roused the fury of a hostile mob; the little band was overwhelmed and taken prisoner. Next day all four were decapitated, and their heads set up in the four corners of the town. As a consequence of this murder, St. Albans was amerced 100 marks after peace had been restored. But the burgesses were substantial men as well as ardent partisans, and the fine was paid with a readiness which probably made the authorities wish that it had been assessed at a higher figure. On the whole, neither town nor Abbey seems to have been very fortunate in its relations with the Government in the time of Roger. Once, when the Abbot chanced to be ill, Edward I's brother, Edmund of Langley, came to the House demanding entertainment. With inexplicable imprudence he was not afforded such accommodation as he considered was due to his rank. He promptly complained to the King, who became so wrathful at the slight that a corrody had to be created for one of his men in order to appease him.[1] For nearly a century this corrody continued to be a charge upon the House, until in 1364 it was at last commuted for certain lands in Langley.

To add to the other troubles of the Abbot, taxation Royal and Papal showed no signs of becoming less burdensome. And in addition to the ordinary exactions, the House continued to be subject to demands which, by their occasional incidence, did much to prevent any satisfactory organization of the finances. The most formidable of these disturbing influences was the Papal claim to "provide" foreigners to Abbey livings as they fell vacant. This claim from time to time deprived the House of the right of presenting to its own churches. Almost equally burdensome was the system of corrodies which now comes into fashion. The King began to claim maintenance for some of his servants at the expense of the House; whenever a new Abbot was inducted, the King had the right to nominate a clerk to receive an annual payment of 100s. from the House. How this right arose we do not know;

[1] "Gesta," i. 469; iii. 113.

but in the reign of Roger, when first we hear of it, it is already described as burdensome and oppressive. Moreover, by the unlucky insult to Edmund of Langley, a fresh corrody came into existence; and there is reason to believe that the number gradually increased until, as we shall see, the nuisance was finally ended by the prudence of Abbot Thomas de la Mare. But of all the charges which worked damage to the House the chief was the expense connected with every vacancy. The necessity of satisfying the demands of Pope and King commonly caused an Abbot to commence his rule with a deficit more or less serious, which had somehow or other to be made up. The constant recurrence of all these charges placed the House in a critical situation at the close of the thirteenth century: it had a great position to maintain, much hospitality to provide, and many expenses to cover. Its resources were moderate withal, and it remained to be seen whether they could continue to sustain the burden to which they were subjected.

CHAPTER VII.

THE THRESHOLD OF THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY.

DESPITE the crushing weight of taxation, Royal and Papal, which the Abbey was called upon to sustain during the latter half of the thirteenth century, its financial condition was not by any means hopeless. The revenue from the estates of the House was steadily upon the increase. In 1086, as we have already noticed, the income from this source had been some £284. During the century next ensuing there must have been a marked accession of wealth, for when next we obtain an estimate, in the middle of Henry III's reign, the figure has risen to 500 marks,[1] or £333. Now the Bishop of Norwich's summary taxation, from which this estimate is derived, was far from being comprehensive despite the pains which were taken over the assessment.[2] Much of the property of the House must have escaped. Half a century later, however, came the most famous of all mediæval valuations, the Ecclesiastical Taxation of Nicholas IV. This was the most thorough inquiry into the possessions of the church that had hitherto been attempted, and the greatest care was taken that no permanent source of income should escape inclusion. The success with which this plan was carried through at St. Albans may be gauged from the fact that the income of that House is therein assessed at nearly £850.[3]

It therefore appears that in the two centuries subsequent to the Conquest, the nominal income of the House has again almost quadrupled. This was doubtless due in the main to the growth of the fashion of bestowing lavish gifts upon houses

[1] "C.P.R.," 1256. [2] "Gesta," i. 356.
[3] "Taxatio Ecclesiastica Nicolai IVti," R.C., 37, 37*b*, 52, 52*b*.

of true religion and sound learning; for at the end of every Abbot's reign between 1086 and 1200 there usually occurs a list of the estates, individually small, but in bulk extremely impressive, acquired by the House during his time. But it should also be remembered that no small credit is due to the careful and intelligent husbanding of resources. The intelligent administration of estates, and the upkeep of what a modern economist would call fixed capital, had become a regular part of the duties of the Abbot and his staff of assistants. The punctuality with which this office was usually performed may be estimated from the censures to which Abbots who lacked economic skill are exposed in the chronicles of the House. The acquisition of fresh possessions and the successful management of the old become increasingly important parts of the Abbot's business: and as time goes on we shall have to notice a tendency on the part of historians to condone spiritual shortcomings in the case of a superior possessed of eminent financial ability.

During the rules of John II and Roger, intelligent attempts were being made to increase the value of the property. One of the most obvious ways of doing this was to obtain from the King the right to hold a market or fair in any given district. The market not only served to stimulate industry among the tenants, and the fair to bring money into the locality, but both the one and the other were sources of direct gain to the Abbot, who claimed for himself the tolls and dues levied on the spot. In 1235 the House obtained the right to hold a market every Thursday at Winslow, as well as a fair on 9 and 10 August every year.[1] In January, 1253, a Thursday market was obtained[2] for Bewick in Northumberland; in October of the same year[3] a Friday market was instituted at Codicote;[4] and four years later the Abbot was allowed to hold an annual fair at the same place on 24 and 25 July.[5] Such grants as these must have contributed largely to the prosperity of the House. Despite the heavy weight of taxation which the community

[1] "C.L.C.," 1235 (42). [2] "C.Ch.R.," 27 Jan., 1235.
[3] *Ibid.* 21 Jan., 1253. [4] *Ibid.* 9 Oct., 1268. [5] *Ibid.* 2 July, 1272.

was called upon to sustain, its members must have had good cause for contentment. The fame of the Abbey doubtless attracted many to taste of the boasted hospitality, and to lay their offerings at the shrine of SS. Alban and Amphibalus. Abbot and convent, one would imagine, must have been well satisfied, save perhaps that they would have willingly seen the King their liege and the Holy Father less zealous to take advantage of their growing prosperity.

Not so the tenants of the House, whose actions prove that they were far from sharing in this placid state of mind. At the end of the thirteenth century these tenants have ceased to exhibit the puzzling gradations of the Domesday period, and fall into three sharply divided classes: first, the free tenants; secondly, the villeins by tenure; thirdly, the bondmen by blood.[1]

Of the first class, the most prominent representatives were the tenants by military service. As we have already noticed, the Abbot owed the small servitium of six knights, which apparently survived without change from the Norman Conquest to the fourteenth century. We are so fortunate as to possess a detailed account of how this service was rendered during the Abbacy of John of Hertford (1235-63). The six knights' fees, which extended to 40½ hides, were split up among twenty-two tenants, two of whom were Abbey obedientiaries.[2] The size of the holdings varied from the 6½ hides of an important person like Roger of Crokesley to the single virgate of the Abbey almoner. Despite the lengths to which the process of division had been carried, each fee remained a separate unit, for the service of which all the holders of land within it, great and small, remained responsible. When the demand for the *servitium debitum* came from the King, it was usual for all the tenants by military service to meet together, and from each fee to elect one chief knight to perform the service due therefrom. The expenses of the man selected, to the extent of six marks, were paid by his co-tenants. Sometimes, as in 1257,[3]

[1] Cf. I. S. Leadam in "Trans. Royal Hist. Soc.," N.S., vi. 217.
[2] Nero D i. ff. 133, 171. [3] *Ibid*, fol. 133.

the Abbot himself would arrange for the performance of the whole service, would hire strangers, and would then levy a scutage upon his tenants. The net cost of hiring six knights, or two knights and eight squires, was reckoned at about 100 marks. The advantages of this plan were the speed with which the demand for service could be met, as compared with the troublesome business of summoning the tenants together, and persuading six of them to undertake an arduous duty; and the increased convenience to all parties. Division, in fact, had been carried so far that the system was fast becoming unworkable. Two of the fees in particular were divided into extremely small holdings. The fee called in 1259 "H. Wac." —apparently after the tenant who had last held it in its integrity, for no one of that name appears among the present occupants—consisted of 5½ hides, and was held by five tenants, of whom one held 1¾ hides, one 1½ hides, two 1 hide each, and one ¼ hide. Still more striking, as illustrating the tendency to disintegration, is the case of the fee called after "Richard de Fonte". It consisted of 7 hides, and was divided among seven tenants; but of these one held 2¼ hides, four held 1 hide each, one held ½ hide, and two actually held ¼ hide between them.

In the case of these much divided holdings, where there was probably no tenant of sufficient substance to undertake the duty of knight-service even if his expenses were paid, it was usual for money to be given to the Abbot, who thereupon provided the knight himself.[1] Of the four other knights' fees, that of Roger of Crokesley comprised 8½ hides, Roger holding 6½ himself; that of Geoffrey of Gorham was 6 hides, of which Geoffrey held 4; that of Roger of Childwick included 5½ hides, of which Roger held 3½. In all these cases there was only one smaller tenant on the fee besides the lord of it, and it seems that the knight was usually found by the tenants themselves. The last fee, that of Roger of Meridene, was divided not very unevenly between four tenants.[2] In addition to the tenants by knight-service, were those who held their land on

[1] Nero D i. ff. 171*b*, 153*b*. [2] *Ibid.* fol. 171.

condition of accompanying the Abbot when he went to Tynemouth. Early in the fourteenth century, at a date, that is, slightly later than the period which we are now considering, there were five of these tenants who found six horses. Two more horses were found "by custom"; one by the Vicar of St. Peter's, and one by the Abbey chamberlain,[1] but these officials are not to be regarded quite as the other tenants, being bound to the House by other ties.

On the whole, the relations between St. Albans and its free tenants were satisfactory. The principal cause of friction, to argue from other instances besides that of Geoffrey of Childwick,[2] was the Abbot's right of free warren, exercised over all the land of the liberty. But the disputes arising from this cause were of infrequent occurrence, and the free tenants do not seem to have had any grave grounds of complaint. Their duties, in addition to the particular services by which they held their land, consisted principally in doing suit at the Abbot's court of the liberty,[3] held under the great ash-tree in the precincts, and at the court of the soke in which they happened to live, held at the caput of the soke. In addition, they had to serve their turn as coroner of the liberty when occasion arose. That these duties were not over-burdensome appears plain from the fact that not until the disorders of the mid-fifteenth century did any serious trouble between the House and its free tenants become apparent.

Far otherwise was it with the second and third classes of tenants, the villeins by tenure and the bondmen by blood. Of the former, strange as it may seem, the principal representatives were the townsmen of St. Albans. As has already been noticed, the town appears to have grown up round the Abbey, and, until the thirteenth century, to have lived in the utmost harmony with it. But throughout the first half of that century the town had been steadily growing in wealth. In 1235 it was considered sufficiently important to contribute to the King's household expenses;[4] while in 1253 the

[1] "Gesta," ii. 208-9.
[2] *Ibid.* i. 317, 319.
[3] "Chron. Maj.," vi. 438.
[4] "C.P.R.," 1235 (52).

burgesses were actually able to obtain a charter freeing them from the operation of the writ of attaint for any tenement within the town.[1] This amounted to saying that the borough court held by the Abbot's reeve on St. Margaret's Day, hitherto the only court of the burgesses, was no longer to be overruled on every occasion by appeal to the court of the liberty, but was to have final jurisdiction over an important class of cases. This was, it appears, the first step in a determined attempt on the part of the burgesses to withdraw themselves altogether from the competence of the court of the liberty. It was probably in consequence of this move on the part of the burgesses that the reeve of the town disappeared about this time, and was replaced by a bailiff[2]—a change which seems to imply the organization of the borough court as a court of the hundred independent of the court of the liberty and outside its competence. None the less, it is plain that the Abbot considered that he still had the right to evoke cases, for in 1262[3] and in 1275[4] the townsmen complained that they had been compelled to plead in a foreign court, contrary to their rights. The importance and the wealth of the town steadily grew; during the troubles of 1265 it was so strong as to be nicknamed "Little London,"[5] and so rich as to pay "readily" the fine of 100 marks exacted for the slaying of the unhappy castellan of Hertford.[6] Relations between town and Abbey grew steadily more strained. As the burgesses waxed prosperous they found that the government of a bailiff who ruled in the interests and name of the Abbot was intolerable. With all their privileges and wealth, they remained uneasily conscious that they were after all but little better than villeins. It was in the Abbot's name that the assizes of bread and ale were held: in his name were tolls taken on merchandise passing through the town and upon goods exposed for sale in the market: for his profit were all the amercements levied within the bounds of the town. The burgesses laboured

[1] "C.P.R.," 1253 (195).
[2] Cf. "V.C.H., Herts," ii. 478.
[3] Assize Roll, "R.C.," 321.
[4] Hundred Rolls, "R.C.," 192.
[5] "Opus Chronicorum," p. 20, R.S.
[6] Above, p. 119.

under other disabilities which, if less damaging, were even more irritating. The strict preservation of the Abbot's estates, the close fencing of his parks, the monopoly of hunting, fishing, and grazing rights which he exercised over the whole neighbourhood, were bad enough; but worse still was his privilege of compelling the townsmen to grind their corn and to full their coarse cloth at his mills. It was over this latter right of the Abbot that disputes were continually breaking out, and to it much of the bad feeling between town and Abbey was due. The matter was all the more serious because the Abbot's privilege was lucrative, and brought him in some 3 per cent of the total revenue from the estates of the House. It was not, therefore, a thing which the House might be expected to wave the moment trouble broke out on account of it. In 1274 some of the more enterprising townsmen flatly refused to submit any longer, and set up handmills of their own.[1] The Abbot distrained, the bailiff carried off the stones of the mills, whereupon the burgesses took the case to law. After levying a forced contribution which was placed in a common chest, they sued the Abbot for trespass. They also endeavoured to enlist the sympathies of Queen Eleanor, who was judged no good friend of the Abbot, for she had been ingloriously worsted by him in a lawsuit for the possession of the manor of Childwick.[2] But their efforts came to nothing. Queen Eleanor, when she came to visit the Abbey, was unable to discover from the townswomen who appealed to her what real cause of grievance they had against Abbot Roger. From the first the legal position of the burgesses was hopeless. To their plea that the servants of the Abbot had wrongfully entered certain houses, and unlawfully removed property therefrom, the Abbot's bailiff replied with crushing effect that he had not come *vi et armis*, but with his white wand of office, for the purpose of protecting the liberty of the Abbot. The visinage swore that the facts were as the bailiff represented, and the townsmen were amerced. Two men of stouter make than the others took the case on appeal to Westminster, but

[1] "Gesta," i. 410. [2] *Ibid.* 401.

the finding of the inquisition was confirmed, and the appellants committed to prison and adjudged to pay a heavy fine.[1] The majority of the burgesses, headed by a certain Robert Spichfat, had already begun to submit sullenly one by one, to take oaths of obedience, and to give pledges for good behaviour. Early in March, 1277, something like a formal reconciliation took place, the whole township promised not to sue the Abbot again, and asked to be taken into his good graces. They gave him a present of wine, and in return he promised to use every endeavour to safeguard them against loss when their corn was being ground. In addition, he agreed that the townsfolk were not to be compelled to attend the hundred court of the liberty unless the case was such as could not be determined in the Abbot's court of the town.[2] Finally, there was to be no more toll on beer. The dispute was thus for the moment composed, but the root of trouble remained untouched. Though the Abbot manifested a praiseworthy desire to make such small concessions as these to the prejudices of the townsfolk, he was naturally unwilling to jeopardize his position by conferring any substantial freedom upon a rising and ambitious community. Hence the discontented hearts of the township remained unappeased, and desire for liberty grew ever stronger. The dissatisfaction was always there, ready to break forth into violence when occasion offered, or when circumstances seemed to make victory possible.

In addition to the men of St. Albans, the Abbot had many other tenants who were subject to the disabilities attendant upon villein service. These, as at the time of Domesday, aided in the cultivation of the demesne, which now amounted to some 75 hides, as compared with the 66 hides of 1086.[3] In many instances these villeins must have been persons of substance, whose increasing prosperity was attested by the increasing revenue of the Abbey. Though not harshly treated, they were in a position inferior to that occupied by members of their order who dwelt on the estates of secular lords. The Abbey, secure in its immortality, its store of written privilege,

[1] "Gesta," i. 419. [2] *Ibid.* 421-3. [3] Nero D i. fol. 171.

its centuries-old experience in the management of business, was enabled to keep a firm hold upon its tenants, being largely immune from those sudden vicissitudes of fortune which from time to time compelled even the most conservative of secular lords to commute the prædial services of their tenants for money payments. The Abbey not only possessed a very precise knowledge of the rights which had been exercised over its villein tenants in the past, but a clear perception of the policy to be pursued if these same rights were to be enforced in the future. A series of rules drawn up towards the end of the thirteenth century for the guidance of future generations in the matter of manorial management, shows that the St. Albans authorities held their dependants in a grasp from which escape must have been extremely difficult.[1] Among the more noteworthy of the regulations affecting the villein class are the following :—

1. No villein may sell his land even to other villeins—"quia plurima destructio est".

2. No freeman may enter upon a villein tenement.

3. If any villein buys land, the House is straightway to enter into possession of it.

4. No villein may sell either corn or cattle without express permission.

5. No villein is to accumulate in his hands more than one single villein holding.

6. On the death of any villein the heriot[2] is to be exacted without delay.

It would be difficult to conceive of a series of regulations more perfectly adapted to the perpetuation of the disabilities under which the dependants of the Abbey laboured.

But if the state of the villeins by tenure was unenviable, much more so was the condition of the bondmen by blood. As to their numbers it is difficult to form any conception, but they were evidently in the later thirteenth century a disap-

[1] "Gesta," i. 453-5.

[2] This exaction was particularly oppressive, consisting at St. Albans of "the best beast and all the household goods". See Vinogradoff, "Villeinage," 160.

pearing class, the characteristic disabilities of which were only to be found in their integrity upon the estates of such lords as the Abbey itself. As late as 1302 the tenure of a bondman of St. Albans exhibited all the old features of earlier and harsher days. He must work upon his lord's land so many days in the week, in addition to the "boon days" at harvest and the like: and although the quantity of the work was fixed, the lord might demand it when and where he chose. Further, the bondman had to pay the hated "merchet of flesh and blood," the price for permission to marry away his daughter: he had no legal status except in the court of his lord, against whom he had in law no protection. In common with his like, he was subject to arbitrary taxation—in sonorous legal phrase "talliabilis de alto et basso ad voluntatem Domini Abbatis".[1] The fact that the bondmen on the Abbey estates, unlike the bondmen on the lands of lay lords, remained wholly under the antiquated system, must be ascribed in no small degree to the careful policy of management which is exhibited by the code of manorial regulations which has already been mentioned. The rules applying to bondmen are even more stringent than those obtaining in the case of villeins. Among the more notable are the following:—

1. Bondmen may not stand surety for freemen.

2. Bondmen are incapable of having heirs, for all their property belongs to the House.

3. Bondmen who leave the land are to be sought diligently until they are recaptured.

4. Sons of bondmen may not leave the manor on which they are born, but must take up their father's holding.

No more oppressive system could well be imagined than that which is here outlined; but a survey of the later history of the Abbey suggests doubts as to whether it was ever carried out in its entirety. For, in the first place, religious houses were as a rule kindly rather than oppressive landlords, and there is no reason to think that St. Albans was an exception

[1] MS. Cotton Tib. E vi. ff. 166*b*, 168*b*. "Registrum Johannis Whethamstede," ii. 324-5. Vinogradoff, op. cit. 153.

to the general truth of this statement. Secondly, when we come to deal with the brief hour of the peasants' triumph in 1381, we shall be driven to notice that the feeling displayed even by the bondmen towards the Abbey is not resentment, far less hatred, but a mere desire to improve their own condition.

Such, in brief, was the economic condition of St. Albans during the reigns of Abbot Roger and of his immediate predecessors. It is now time to turn to the other aspects of life at the Abbey towards the close of the thirteenth century.

In the time of Roger the tradition of historical compilation was carefully maintained. Although no writer of the calibre of Paris arose to continue the work of recording the history of England on a scale so elaborate as that achieved in the "Chronica Majora," yet the scriptorium of St. Albans found no unworthy director in the careful though unpretentious William of Rishanger. His "Chronica" and his "Gesta Edwardi Primi" remain among the most important sources for the history of the years 1259-1307. Of Rishanger's personality nothing is known, and the only works which can with certainty be ascribed to his pen are those which have been mentioned. The other writings sometimes attributed to him prove, on closer inspection, to be the work of several different hands, though displaying manifest traces of common inspiration. There is thus reason to believe that much work of a character similar to his own was being carried on, presumably under his direction, by other members of the scriptorium whose names have now perished. In other words, St. Albans is no longer a home of isolated if brilliant historians; from this time forward it ranks as a school of historical writing.

Nor was the library neglected. Abbot Roger presented two copies of the Decretals, the glosses of Geoffrey and Bernard on the Decretals, and the Summae of Reymund—noteworthy indications of the legal tastes of the House. He also presented a volume of the works of Seneca, written with his own hand. But from the standpoint of education, Roger's reign is particularly noteworthy as marking the beginning of

the long connection between St. Albans and the University of Oxford. This was not primarily a consequence of the literary traditions of the House, but arose out of a general resolution of the English Benedictines to improve the condition of learning among members of the Order. In 1289 was held the General Council of the Benedictines of the province of Canterbury, which imposed a tax upon all Houses of the congregation within the province so that a hall could be maintained at Oxford to which each convent should send one or more scholars in proportion to its numbers. It was usual to send one scholar for every twenty monks; but a house like St. Albans, with its traditions of culture, would frequently send two or three times the minimum number. Indeed, it became a point of honour to maintain the largest number possible of St. Albans brethren at "Gloucester College," the dwelling of the Benedictines at Oxford; and a few years later a careful system was organized among the congregation of the St. Albans Chapter to provide for the payment of the pensions which supported these scholars.

CHAPTER VIII.

DANGERS AND DIFFICULTIES.

THE rule of Abbot Roger came to an end in the winter of 1290. He died on 3 November, and on 11 November a *congé d'élire* was obtained.[1] But the House had the misfortune to fall into the hands of an extortionate escheator, who took full advantage of the failure or the omission of the convent to obtain the custody of the Abbey during the vacancy. He deprived the obedientiaries of their offices, and replaced them by his own creatures: he levied tallages upon the tenants: he seized and sold a portion of the Abbot's stock, and he actually attempted to exercise his authority over the property of the convent, with which he had no concern. In sheer desperation, prior and convent were driven to compound for the property of the House. Fifty pounds had to be paid for the movables of the late Abbot: seventy marks for the harvest of Park: an hundred pounds for the sheep: an hundred marks for the woods.[2] Besides having to endure this material damage, the convent had the annoyance of seeing their precincts violated by an host of discourteous officials.

A general Chapter of the congregation of St. Albans was held on 9 December, in which, as a result of the usual form of election by compromise, Brother John of Berkhamstead was chosen Abbot. The troublesome journey to Rome had next to be undertaken, the cost of which exceeded £1000. Then the host of formalities had to be gone through as usual, and not until 2 June, 1291, were the temporalities of the Abbey restored.[3] Before long, John found himself involved in the

[1] "C.P.R.," 1290 (394). [2] "Gesta," ii. 5, 6. [3] "C.P.R.," 1291 (430).

usual disputes with those who felt themselves aggrieved by the rights of the House. Like that of his two immediate predecessors, his rule was really one sustained struggle against various opponents.

Characteristically enough, the first dispute arose in connection with one of the cells. Tynemouth was at this time a place of great importance, one of the few safe spots in the countryside when the Scots crossed the border. Doubtless its convent resented its position of inferiority, which contrasted so markedly with the independence enjoyed by other houses of less importance and smaller possessions. Certain it is that the Prior, a strong and enterprising man named Adam of Tewing, determined that the time had now come to shake off the suzerainty of his distant lord, the Abbot of St. Albans. Although, as his name shows, he hailed from the neighbourhood of the Abbey, and was presumably a former member of the convent, he had no hesitation in working against the interests of his old House. In some way or other he persuaded the King to claim a right over the advowson of the cell—on what grounds we do not know. Edward I would probably not be unwilling to discover that he had some claim to a House which was as valuable as a good-sized monastery. Abbot John, however, got early intelligence of Adam's design, and rode hard for the north. He came upon the scene when he was least expected, enlisted the aid of the Mayor of Newcastle, suborned one of Adam's confidants, and suddenly gained admission to the Castle of Tynemouth. The Prior and his principal associate, John of Trokelowe, were arrested and sent in chains to St. Albans. The Abbot then addressed himself to the King, and succeeded after much trouble in convincing him that his claim was ungrounded. In May, 1293,[1] the right of the Abbot and convent was fully acknowledged, and a very serious danger thus averted from the House. By his display of timely vigour, John seems to have given a death-blow to the desire of Tynemouth for independence. Not until 1519, at the time of the Abbey's greatest weakness,

[1] "C.P.R.," 1293 (11).

was the powerful cell emancipated.[1] This was not the only dispute which sprang from Abbot John's cells: some six years after the Tynemouth affair, trouble once more arose with the cell of Wymondham, as was inevitable from the ambiguous relations existing between the Abbot, the Prior, and the Patron. On this occasion the dispute assumed proportions so formidable that the Abbot was forcibly hindered by the patron, Sir Robert of Tattershall, from visiting the cell, and was driven to demand a commission of Oyer and Terminer in order to secure himself from further molestation. Here again he was successful in the last resort.

On three occasions during the reign of John was the liberty of St. Albans in serious danger. In the summer of 1297 there was some friction between the townsfolk and the Abbey officials which culminated in a complaint by the former to the King. Upon inquiry, the Abbot was found guilty of certain offences against the assizes of bread and ale which led to the market being taken for some weeks into the King's hands. The restoration was not long delayed, but the forfeiture must have been a sore blow to the pride of the House.[2] John, however, appears to have turned the tables on his opponents to some extent, for he obtained a commission of Oyer and Terminer to inquire into infringements of his chartered rights,[3] and it is plain from the subsequent history of the relations between town and Abbey that the former gained no advantage over the latter at this stage. It was probably because John's attention was distracted by this dispute, as well as by the quarrel over Wymondham, that he allowed the wardens of Hertford Castle to levy toll and traverse for the King's use within the liberty of St. Albans. At first toll had been taken at Barnet; but at last, growing bolder with immunity, the royal officials commenced to levy the duty within the very borough of St. Albans itself. In 1299, however, the Abbot took vigorous action. On appeal to the Exchequer, the sole right of the House to levy such dues was asserted and allowed. The

[1] "C.L.P.," 1519 (510). [2] "C.C.R.," 1297 (36).
[3] "C.P.R.," 1297 (316).

wardens were bidden to cease their exactions not only in St. Albans, but also in Barnet.[1] This seems to have been looked upon, at any rate by the convent, as a test case. Such an infringement of their rights, if once allowed to pass unquestioned, would soon entail the destruction of the liberty itself. The third attack upon St. Albans arose out of the right of exemption. The imperious Archbishop Winchelsea, when in the course of a visitation, demanded hospitality at the Abbey. This the Abbot was afraid to give unless he received a guarantee that the privilege of the House should not in future suffer for the admission of the Primate. Winchelsea refused the requisite security, in great indignation laid the town under interdict, and put up at an inn. He left on the morrow, refusing to be placated, and uttering threats of vengeance which were not, as a matter of fact, carried out; for Abbot John died shortly afterwards, and the Prior made peace with the angry Primate.[2]

Abbot John had evidently retained vivid memories of the oppressions of the royal escheator on the occasion of the last vacancy. At the beginning of 1301 the King happened to be indebted to the Abbey to the extent of 1000 marks; and the Abbot determined to take the opportunity of enlarging the privileges of the House by limiting the powers of the escheator. As a price of the remission of the debt, he obtained an Inspeximus and confirmation of all the liberties of the House as embodied in the charters of Offa, Henry I, Henry II, Richard, and Henry III,[3] together with a grant to the Prior and convent of the custody of the House during a vacancy for a fine of 1000 marks on each occasion, saving to the King only his rights in the military tenants and in the presentation to churches falling vacant.[4] Now this grant, which was the pride of John and of his convent, was among the principal causes of the financial troubles of the Abbey during the next three-quarters of a century. Doubtless the intrusions of the escheator were exasperating, but the material loss they caused

[1] "Gesta," ii. 36-41. [2] *Ibid.* 47, 48. [3] "C.Ch.R.," 1301 (17-21).
[4] "C.C.R.," 1301 (430). "C.P.R.," 1301 (604). "Gesta," ii. (32-34).

was comparatively slight. In no case does it seem to have approached the figure of the fine which had to be paid to the King—which, it must be remembered, amounted to little short of a whole year's revenue from the estates. Such an arrangement as this, which must have been made at a time when the offertories at the shrines of SS. Alban and Amphibalus were so large as to remove from the estates to some considerable degree the burden of supporting the Abbey, became a source of dire oppression to the House when from disturbance in the country, or from changing fashion, the oblations began to diminish. But in fairness to John, it must be remembered that many of the disastrous consequences of his precious privilege arose from a contingency which he could not foresee. Owing to a succession of short-lived Abbots, St. Albans fell vacant five times within the next half-century; and as a result became hopelessly indebted to the King. None the less, it should have been apparent at the time that the price paid for the privilege was wholly incommensurate with the financial advantages it afforded.

During the whole reign of John, the Abbey seems to have had but a slight connection with English politics—a fact which goes far to show that the state of the place was satisfactory from the religious point of view. The Abbot was, however, involved in the troubles which arose from the attempt of Boniface VIII to secure the exemption of the clergy from taxation by secular authorities. When the English ecclesiastics were outlawed, the Abbot of St. Albans, probably having more to lose than most of his brethren, made his peace with the King without much delay. In September, 1294, he paid his share of the Tenth and was admitted to protection with his cells.[1] This appears to have been the only occasion on which the House was mixed up with the general politics of England. There can be no doubt, however, that it was in high favour with Edward I. Between 1294 and 1303 he is known to have stayed at St. Albans on seven occasions.[2] In July, 1296, the

[1] "C.P.R.," 1294 (90). Rymer, i. 810.

[2] Rymer, i. 796, 797, 834, 860, 893, 914, 920.

Abbot was one of the prelates directed to pray for the soul of Edmund of Langley—an office which cannot have been very grateful to Abbot John, but which was doubtless a mark of esteem on the King's part;[1] and in September, 1300, John celebrated by royal request the obsequies of Edmund, Earl of Cornwall.[2] Four years later, moreover, the King paid a compliment to the historical reputation of the House by bidding them, among others, search their records for anything which might throw light upon the past feudal relations between the crowns of England and Scotland.[3] In reply, the St. Albans authorities sent a long series of extracts from their chronicles, couched in terms calculated to flatter the King's desire of claiming suzerainty over Scotland itself.

During the whole time of John, the tradition of historical composition remained unbroken at St. Albans. There were, indeed, symptoms of a decline not merely from the genius of Paris, but from the somewhat uninspired precision of Rishanger. The two historians who inhabited the scriptorium at this time, John of Trokelowe and Henry of Blandford, present defects which to modern eyes are flagrant. Their style is bad, their method worse. While adopting the annalistic form, they do not observe it consistently but branch out into digressions which destroy the proportion of the whole. Yet with all their faults they are careful and accurate narrators of events. No other English religious House can boast of a single writer in any way approaching these two St. Albans historians in solid worth as first-rate authority for the time.

On 19 October, 1301, died Abbot John, worn out with his eleven years of constant battling on behalf of the House. The convent joyfully exhibited the new privilege to the escheator, who retired baffled after merely taking simple seisin in the King's name. The House then turned to the election of a new abbot. The only obvious candidate was Prior John Maryns, who had been passed over at the last election, apparently on the ground of a certain tactlessness and lack of *savoir faire*. He was elected by the usual form in a general Chapter

[1] "Rymer," i. 842, and above, p. 119. [2] Rymer, i. 922. [3] *Ibid.* 923.

held at St. Albans on 2 January, 1302, and on the 30th of the same month the royal assent to the election was signified.[1] John proceeded to the Curia, and was subjected to the usual extortionate charges before he could secure confirmation. None the less, although his expenses amounted to some 1250 marks,[2] he celebrated his installation feast with a banquet of peculiar magnificence. Perhaps he was wise to enjoy his new dignity, for his troubles were soon to begin. During his absence, the convent had attempted to avoid the payment of Queen's Geld, a percentage which fell due upon the 1000 marks payable to the King for the vacancy. Abbot John protested vigorously, but to his disgust was compelled to disburse the 30 marks claimed by the Queen's treasurer. Moreover, the indomitable escheator, though thwarted as far as the House was concerned, had turned his attention to the cells, particularly that of Wymondham, which happened to fall vacant. The advent of the royal officials was accompanied by the usual features—tallages of tenants, displacement of obedientiaries, and insolence of behaviour. As a result of this incident, the Abbot, with much expenditure of money and trouble, secured a declaration from the Exchequer that the cells of the Abbey should share the privilege of the Mother House.

John quickly justified his reputation for tactlessness by displaying a certain inability to let well alone. He embarked upon a long and vigorous reform of the House at a time when it is to the highest degree improbable that any reform was needed. The result was that his activities were usually misplaced or unfortunate. One of the changes he made is bitterly lamented by the author of the "Gesta". Struck by the imperfection of the night singing, he had sconces distributed in the choir so that the memory of the singers might be refreshed by reference to service books. The result was, if the narrator of the incident is to be believed, that the monks gave up learning so much by heart, took the service less devoutly, and knew less.[3] Being an enthusiast for learning, moreover, he

[1] "C.P.R.," 1302 (11). [2] "C.P.L.," 1302 (602).
[3] "Gesta," ii. 106.

allowed the brethren to converse upon certain topics in the silences, for the sake of study and instruction. In consequence of this, it became extremely difficult to maintain the silences at times not subject to this relaxation.[1] On the whole, John's efforts at reform do not seem to have met with success ; partly, probably, because there was little in the outward observance of the Rule that needed amendment. What was required, if the discipline of the House was once more to be raised to the pitch of perfection, was something which no regulation could give, a renewal of the enthusiasm which alone could make real and living the service and labour prescribed by the Rule. This spirit of zeal was far removed from the temper of the early fourteenth century, a hard, brilliant, and materialistic age.

Abbot John then turned his attention to the cells, where he found a good deal to amend. During the busy anxious reign of the preceding Abbot, it is probable that the cells had been somewhat neglected, with the result that the inmates had become easy-going and perhaps insubordinate. John de Maryns issued a code of regulations for the amendment of discipline, which clearly shows the nature of the faults it was designed to amend. The greatest stress was laid upon such points as the observance of the silences : the observance of the rule forbidding the brethren to possess property : and the limitation of the misericordes of drink. There were some hints that the priors had occasionally failed to maintain their authority over their brethren, and that the management of the property had not always been judicious. That there was some carelessness in discipline seems plain ; that there were any grave scandals seems unlikely.

In the time of Maryns the disastrous financial policy of the last Abbot was already making itself felt. It was found almost impossible to raise the 1000 marks due for the last vacancy, and the House was unable to discharge its obligations towards the creditors from whom it had borrowed money to provide the expenses of the Abbot's journey to Rome. In

[1] "Gesta," ii. 107.

1305 the House was so far in debt that a custodian had to be appointed; apparently with the object of assisting in the administration of its resources, and of excluding bailiffs [1]. At the end of John's reign, so little had been done to put the resources of the Abbey under a sound system of administration, that while there were only 17 marks in the Treasury, £1300 was due to various creditors, and the 1000 marks payable on the last vacancy had not been completely discharged.[2]

John was not a strong man, and the prime necessity of the time was an Abbot who perceived what to do and could do it with success. Other people were not slow to take advantage of the weak side of Maryns' character. Early in 1307 no less a person than the Bishop of Lichfield, Treasurer of England, attempted to browbeat the House into granting him a pension of £30 a year for three lives. As far as the Abbot was concerned no opposition was made to this preposterous demand; but the convent showed greater determination. After a hot debate in Chapter, the request of the Bishop was refused [3] by the monks themselves. The incident is of importance as showing that on occasion the brethren of St. Albans could and did act independently of the Abbot even in an affair of grave consequence. The House was apprehensive as to what might be the issue of defying a man so powerful as the Bishop of Lichfield; but the fears of the convent were removed by the accession of the young Edward of Carnarvon, who hated him. The Treasurer fell, and the House breathed freely once more. But John's unlucky tactlessness soon involved him in further trouble. He gave mortal offence to the young King by refusing to oblige him with the loan of some carts to assist in the building operations which were going on in King's Langley.[4] The small request was denied on the score of poverty; and in consequence, Abbot John had to lavish large sums in a fruitless endeavour to avert the King's wrath through the mediation of Piers Gaveston.

In fine, the abbacy of Maryns had been extremely disas-

[1] "C.P.R.," 1305 (335); cf. *ibid.* 1309 (194).
[2] "Gesta," ii. 108.
[3] *Ibid.* 90-3.
[4] *Ibid.* 95.

trous. He left the House deeply in debt, with diminished credit; and when he died on 23 February, 1309, he could only direct an appeal to be made to the Pope for remission of dues on account of the insolvency of the Abbey. He was the only weak ruler St. Albans ever had; his sole title to respect is the code of regulations for the discipline of Abbey and cells—regulations which, there is reason to believe, he was unable to enforce.[1]

On 28 February a *congé d'élire* was obtained,[2] and some time in March apparently, the cellarer, Hugh of Eversdon, was elected Abbot. The situation was such as to make the office no sinecure. Nor was Hugh exactly the man for the place. He was a cultured gentleman, whose weakness in Latin and whose strength in French and English indicate that his education had not been monastic. He was, like all his predecessors, a lover of learning; he encouraged historical composition, and maintained with diligence the connection between the House and Oxford. He was a personal friend of the young King—it may be that this is sufficient to account for the election of one who stands out as a man of the world rather than as a monk, especially in view of the fact that the Abbey was known to be in the bad books of Edward on account of the foolish conduct of the late Abbot. If Hugh was chosen with the intention of pacifying the King, the design was certainly successful; though the troubles of the reign made the upshot less fortunate than might have been expected.

Hugh's difficulties began early. Dreading that a personal appearance at the Curia might disclose his defective Latinity, he dispatched proctors in his stead. "Horrible expenses" were incurred, and after all the Abbot was informed that he must come to Avignon himself. Accordingly, all the fees had to be paid over again before the election was confirmed. In October, 1309, the House was so deeply in debt that a custodian of the gate had to be appointed to exclude bailiffs and

[1] "Gesta," ii. 107. [2] "C.P.R.," 1309 (101).

other undesirable persons.[1] None the less, in January, 1310, the Abbot had to contract a loan of £1000 to cover the expenses connected with his journey to Rome.[2] The financial condition of the House was now most serious; and in the following November, Hugh had to obtain a faculty authorizing him to levy a subsidy upon his cells for a space of three years.[3] The period was apparently extended from time to time until it embraced almost the whole reign.[4] This, as might be expected, led to growing trouble and bad feeling between Abbot and Priors, which made itself felt in the political disturbances of the years 1318-20, as will be noticed below. In the meantime, nothing seemed to relieve the financial distress of the House. The convent was driven to the disastrous expedients of selling corrodies for ready money, and of disposing of Abbey lands by lease for long periods of years.[5] The crisis was aggravated by a series of bad harvests during the years 1315-17. In March of the former year, the King was obliged to fix the price of live-stock, with a view to alleviating the dearth at St. Albans;[6] but the rise of prices continued, and when Edward came to visit his friend the Abbot in August, it was found almost impossible to provide him with enough bread.[7] In 1317 also, the price of ale was so high that it was found impossible to observe the *assisa cervisiæ*, despite special enactments to keep prices down.[8] Throughout all these lean years King Edward seems to have been a good friend to the Abbey: in 1313 the Abbot was allowed the amercements of his men wherever they might happen to be levied:[9] in February of the next year the House was allowed £400 for its immediate expenses, £100 as the King's free gift, and £300 by way of a loan:[10] and in the very next month, Edward granted 100 marks to the repair of choir-stalls.[11] And it is probable that his friendship preserved the House from at least

[1] "C.P.R.," 1309 (194).
[2] "C.P.L.," 1310 (65).
[3] *Ibid.* 75.
[4] "Gesta," ii. 130.
[5] Cf. "Gesta," ii. 118, 179.
[6] Trokelowe, "Annales," 89, R.S.
[7] *Ibid.* 92.
[8] *Ibid.* 96.
[9] "C.Ch.R.," 1313 (216).
[10] "C.C.R.," 1314 (38).
[11] *Ibid.* (53). "Gesta," ii. 124.

one serious danger. Whether the financial condition was a matter of common knowledge, or whether the Abbey in its poverty had attempted to levy increased dues upon the burgesses, cannot be determined: it is at any rate certain that at this time there was a recurrence of trouble with the town of St. Albans.[1] Several leading burgesses, sons, doubtless, of the men who had attempted to resist Abbot Roger, denied suit of multure, and insisted on setting up their own handmills. When the Abbot attempted to distrain upon them, they resisted his officers by force; and, carrying the war into their opponent's territory, entered his close, destroyed one of his Houses, and felled some of his trees. The names of Benedict Spichfat, Robert of Lymbury, and Simon of Ikelford are specially mentioned in connection with these outrages.[2] From November, 1313, to April, 1314, the disturbances continued, but with the King's help were at last put under. But the burgesses, for all their show of submission, were thoroughly discontented, and only waited for a favourable opportunity before renewing their pretensions.

The friendship of Edward II was, however, by no means an unmixed blessing: and Hugh identified himself most completely with that unpopular monarch. In consequence, the Abbey found it impossible to keep clear of the political disturbances which characterized the latter part of the reign. And unfortunately for the House, political interests became involved in purely domestic questions. As we have seen, the financial policy of Hugh prevented the relations between himself and the priors of the cells from being cordial. Among these priors was a certain William of Somerton, an unbusinesslike person who wasted the substance of his Priory of Binham in foolish alchemical experiments; but who, unfortunately for Hugh, was an enemy of the unpopular Sir Hugh le Despencer, the reigning favourite.[3] William refused to contribute to the dues levied by the Abbot, and loudly proclaimed the oppression of the latter's governance. When in 1319 Abbot Hugh

[1] "Gesta," ii. 148.
[2] "C.P.R.," 1313 (65-6); *ibid.* 1314 (137).
[3] "Gesta," ii. 141.

attempted to deprive the Prior, William found a host of powerful supporters, including all the enemies of the Despencers. Chief among these supporters was Earl Thomas of Lancaster, who never omitted an opportunity of showing his ill-will towards the friends of his royal cousin. The Abbot was forcibly prevented from taking possession of the cell, and Prior William was encouraged to go to the Curia, where, notwithstanding the dispatch of the royal letters denouncing him, he was able to obtain the citation of the Abbot to answer various charges of oppression.[1] In 1320 the King interfered vigorously on behalf of his friend the Abbot: he compelled the armed men occupying Binham to withdraw,[2] and aided the Abbot to assert his authority over the Prior and certain rebellious members of the community.[3] More than all besides, he caused the collusive arrest of Hugh as he was preparing to leave England for the Curia, thereby saving the Abbot both trouble and expense.[4] Curious though it may seem, the Abbot found it impossible to punish Somerton, who was arrested by his request, on account of the number and the rank of those who interceded for him. Accordingly, the Prior, on making submission, was restored. But as his management of the finances was no better than before, he shortly became involved in fresh difficulties and was compelled to take to flight. It was doubtless in consequence of this episode that Hugh compelled his priors to take a new and stringent oath recognizing the superiority of the Abbey, and renouncing all claim to independence.[5] Unfortunately, the Abbot had not heard the last of William of Somerton. In 1322, when the barons were meditating the downfall of the Despencers, the Abbey came within an ace of suffering severely at the hands of those who accused the Abbot of persecuting Somerton from friendship to the Despencers. The town was occupied for three days;[6] and the proposal to ravish the Abbey lands in revenge for

[1] "Rymer," ii. 391. [2] "C.C.R.," 1320 (271).
[3] "Gesta," ii. 140.
[4] "C.C.R.," 1320 (226). "Gesta," ii. 137-9. [5] "Gesta," ii. 145.
[6] Trokelowe, "Annales," 108. Walsingham, "Hist. Ang.," i. 160, R.S.

Somerton's persecution was only abandoned owing to the sudden death of the proposer.

Unluckily enough, at the very time when the Abbey was in a bad odour with the most powerful personages in the sphere of politics, its financial situation, which had long been precarious, was complicated by a series of unprecedented catastrophes to the fabric. Abbot Hugh had rather rashly undertaken some unnecessary building operations early in his reign, which, though they culminated in the glorious Lady Chapel at the east end of the church, must be condemned as extravagant and wasteful considering the impoverished state of the House. By dint of reducing his own expenditure and cutting down the rations of the convent, he had just been able to find the money necessary to bring his enterprises to a successful completion.[1] This naturally left him without provision for sudden emergencies. In June, 1323, an important wall near the dortoir fell down, and had to be repaired: a few months later the sanitary arrangements of the monks' hostrey went wrong: and finally, on 10 October,[2] two main pillars on the south side of the church collapsed, so that the entire roof of the south aisle, and portions of its walls, collapsed. Somehow money had to be raised for the repair of these damages, and after the Somerton incident, Hugh must have known that it would be difficult to obtain more subsidies from the priors of the cells. He seems to have solved the problem by letting out the lands of the House on long leases, regardless of the troubles which must be caused thereby to his successors.[3] But the real importance of these disasters lies in the fact that they deprived the House for the moment of financial resources at a time when its need was most urgent; for the burgesses of St. Albans were exhibiting a decidedly hostile spirit, and from the political situation it looked as though King Edward would not be able

[1] "Gesta," ii. 115.

[2] Despite the doubts of Riley there can be no question as to the day. Cf. the St. Albans' Calendar MS. Reg. 2 B vi. (B.M.) and the "Peterborough Psalter" (edited Van den Gheyn), *sub mense* "October".

[3] "Gesta," ii. 179.

to protect the Abbey, or indeed any of his friends, much longer.

It was in 1324 that the townsmen first commenced to turn to account the unprecedented weakness of the House. Taking the opportunity afforded by some minor dispute between the Abbey officials and the leading burgesses, a mob of some forty townsmen broke into the Abbey, forced the door of the Treasury, and carried off goods and muniments. Apparently they had attempted, by a bold stroke, to deprive the Abbot of the charters in virtue of which he claimed superiority over themselves, for the principal part of the loss of the House seems to have been in parchments.[1] What redress the Abbot obtained we do not know; but it was certainly inadequate, for before three years had expired there broke out between Abbey and town the most formidable discord hitherto experienced. In the critical months following the imprisonment of the unfortunate Edward II in January, 1327 (n.s.), the local government throughout the country broke down entirely. Rioting broke out in London, and was imitated at many other places. The commonalty took the opportunity of asserting what they deemed to be their rights; law and authority were alike powerless. St. Albans was not to escape the troubles which overtook Abingdon[2] and Bury St. Edmunds.[3] The lesser townsfolk rose first, as they who had least to lose in any disturbance. In January, 1327, they forced their wealthier neighbours, who viewed the movement with secret sympathy but open deprecation, to join them in committing various excesses intended to bring the authority of the House into contempt. They then presented to the Abbot certain articles embodying their grievances. They accused him of retaining certain of their charters: of depriving them of the enjoyment of certain liberties to the existence of which Domesday was alleged to bear witness. They demanded the right of electing the burgesses who represented the town in Parliament, instead of allowing them

[1] "C.P.R.," 1324 (407). [2] "E.H.R.," October, 1911, 731.
[3] Arnold, "Memorials of Bury St. Edmunds," ii. 323, R.S. Cf. Gasquet, "Greater Abbeys," 51.

to be appointed by the Abbot, as hitherto seems to have been the case since representation began in the early years of the fourteenth century. They asked also for common in pasture and piscary: for the right of possessing handmills: for the privilege of responding to the Itinerant Justices by a jury of twelve sworn townsmen: for the custody of the assizes of bread and ale by the same body: and, finally, for power to exclude the bailiff of the liberty from interfering in matters which could be settled by the bailiff of the town. In short, what the townsfolk wanted, what they were prepared to obtain by violence, was nothing less than complete independence of the Abbey. All these articles, rather revolutionary than restorative as they were, were carefully supported by a disingenuous appeal to ancient liberties which had no existence.[1]

Hugh attempted to evade these demands by procrastination. He also took measures to secure the safety of the House by hiring armed men. It was probably on account of this prudent course that the House escaped the pillage which was the fate of Bury St. Edmunds about this time.[2] The townsmen, well aware that their hour was passing, subjected the Abbey to a regular siege for ten days, so that at last the sheriff had to go to its relief with the *posse comitatus*. The burgesses, seeing that nothing further was to be gained by violence, and being well aware of the financial disorder of the House, had recourse to negotiations. On 23 February a meeting took place at St. Paul's between the advocates of Abbey and town, and after long discussion the Abbot's party was compelled to agree to a most disastrous compromise. An indenture was drawn up granting to the townsfolk everything they claimed, with the single exception of the handmills, the whole question of which was carefully left open. A commission of twenty-four burgesses was appointed to perambulate the town, and confirm the ancient metes and boundaries, in token of complete independence. Well aware of their own strength, the newly-enfranchised burgesses, not content with taking seisin of their common, with violating the warren of the Abbot, with

[1] "Gesta," ii. 158. [2] Arnold, loc. cit.

hunting his game, took the law into their own hands by setting up more than eighty private handmills in the town.[1] They made a seal of office, they set up a communal organization, they levied heavy tallages to meet the expenses arising from the acquisition and exercise of their new privileges. They bore all the taxes without a murmur, complains the Abbey chronicler mournfully, counting all such exactions as nothing in comparison with their freedom from the hated yoke of the House.[2]

It is difficult at first sight to explain a surrender so complete of the chartered rights of the House: and Freeman was misled into assuming that the townsmen had law on their side, and were merely concerned to defend ancient privileges from the usurpation of the monks.[3] As has already been made plain, this is exactly the reverse of the truth. And when brought into relation with contemporary politics, the surrender is not, after all, very surprising. Obviously strong interest was made on behalf of the burgesses, probably by the Queen and Mortimer, who must have hated Abbot Hugh, the friend and favourite of the deposed King. Such a supposition seems confirmed by two circumstances. In the first place, when the horrified convent were on the point of rejecting the agreement with contumely, Abbot Hugh in the utmost distress implored them to consent, lest worse should befall. Something besides his timidity must have been in question, for a peremptory letter came from the Government, commanding the brethren to confirm the agreement at once. And though, as we noticed above in the case of the Bishop of Lichfield, the convent were quite capable of refusing point-blank to follow the lead of a weak Abbot, in the present case they submitted, but under solemn protest that they were acting *per vim et metum*, and not *de mera voluntate*.[4] And in the second place, a commission was appointed in March of the same year (1327) to inquire by whose negligence the existing defects in the Abbey, and

[1] "Gesta," ii. 176. [2] *Ibid.* 216.
[3] "Annals of an English Abbey: Short Studies." Third Series.
[4] "Gesta," ii. 170.

the dissipation of its revenues, had been brought about.[1] This seems plain indication that the Abbot was not in the good books of the Government. What was the finding of the commission we do not know; but it is unlikely, if any serious negligences had been discovered on the part of the Abbot, that he would have been suffered to end his days in peace. He died on 8 September following, just a fortnight before the murder of his unhappy friend, the deposed and imprisoned Edward of Carnarvon.

The appointment of this commission is significant of changing times. There had been days when no Government, however powerful, would have ventured so to interfere in the internal affairs of the premier House in the land. But the close of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth centuries are remarkable for a deliberate determination on the part of the secular authorities to be master even of the exempt monasteries. It was no longer possible for a House which possessed the highest of privileges to remain utterly apart, as an *imperium in imperio*. This new condition of affairs finds its expression in legislation: but the effect of the legislation is generally marred by the tendency of English Kings to make special terms with the Pope or with any other ecclesiastical power whenever it seemed profitable to do so. Had the statutes of Mortmain and of Carlisle[2] ever been really effectual, they would have held a principal place in our survey of the state of St. Albans during the period of transition between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. But the former merely involved the purchasing of a licence to evade its provisions, while the latter brought no relief to a House whose most precious privilege was connected with the payment of dues direct to the Curia.

During the later thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, we look in vain in the history of the Abbey for any reflection,

[1] "C.P.R.," 1327 (84).

[2] 7 Edward I (1279), "Statutum de Viris Religiosis": 35 Edward I (1306-7), "Statutum Karlioli" (De asportatis Religiosorum). "Rerum Brit. Scriptores," No. 12, ii. 488.

however faint, of the constitutional spirit which was exercising an effect so marked upon the history of the country at large. Any trace of opposition on the part of the convent to the absolute authority of the Abbot seems due rather to the personal weakness of the latter than to any determination of the former to assert their right of assisting in the management of affairs. And yet the mere fact that the convent had a seal of its own, as distinguished from the official seal belonging to the Abbot, must have given the brethren a certain strength. How far the provision of the Statute of Carlisle [1] directing that the head of a religious house was to resign the custody of its seal to the Prior and the four "dignores" ever came into force at St. Albans is uncertain. As far as can be seen, the convent had always possessed the separate seal necessitated by the separate management of their estates apart from the estates of the Abbot; and the seals of both Abbot and convent seem to have been required for the raising of a loan on the security of the House. This was perhaps at first a mere precautionary measure, due to the ease with which the seal of either party separately could be counterfeited. If it ever had a constitutional bearing at all at St. Albans, it could only have been during the reign of an Abbot so weak as Maryns. Later in the fourteenth century, as we shall see, the Abbots of St. Albans exercise authority as absolute as had their Norman predecessors.

[1] "Rerum Brit. Scriptores," as above.

CHAPTER IX.

THREE GREAT ABBOTS.

HUGH'S abbacy had been most disastrous, less perhaps by his own fault than by the singular difficulty of the times in which he lived. At the date of his election the state of the finances had been precarious; when he died the House was almost bankrupt. Not only was it heavily in debt; its property was seriously encumbered with leases, mortgages, and corrodies. Moreover, the Abbot had been compelled by the pressure of his enemies to abandon some of the most valued rights of the House—those which entailed superiority over the flourishing town which had grown up round the precincts of the Abbey. His death, if it added to the embarrassment of the House by necessitating another payment of 1000 marks, opened the way for a successor who was to undo the damage that had been inflicted upon the House during the reign of Edward II. On 29 October, 1327, a certain Richard of Wallingford was chosen Abbot of St. Albans in succession to Hugh of Eversdon. He is noteworthy, among other reasons, as being the first of the Abbey's Oxford scholars to attain to a position so dignified. As adopted son of the Prior of Wallingford, he had been sent to the University, where he took his bachelor's degree, and then entered religion at St. Albans. Abbot Hugh, recognizing his rare talents, sent him back to Oxford as one of the students of the House at Gloucester College. At the time of Hugh's death, as his fortune would have it, Richard happened to be on a visit to St. Albans,[1] and it was to this chance, combined, no doubt, with his fame as a scholar, that he owed his election.

Richard's first acts were such as to justify the choice

[1] "Gesta," ii. 182-3.

of the convent. He lived in the humblest and least ostentatious manner, and then set out for Avignon after making the very moderate request of 30s. for the expenses of his journey.[1] The usual business of confirmation was undergone, which in this case proved even more troublesome and expensive than usual, owing to the discovery of some slight informality in the record of his election, which necessitated his re-election at the hands of the Pope. With all his rigid economy, Richard found that at the Curia alone his expenses exceeded 700 marks and the total cost of the journey was £953 10s. 11d.[2] He returned home with all speed, and commenced the work of reorganization, which was to raise the House once more to the first place among English abbeys.

From the first, he set himself to regain for the House the liberties which had been lost in the time of its weakness. Before renewing the contest with the townsmen, he took careful measures to make his success certain. The initial step was to reduce the finances of the Abbey to something like order. He set himself to practise the most rigid economy in the matter of personal expenditure. In February, 1329, he obtained royal permission to live away from the House for the next three years, in order to spare expenses of entertaining guests, and of maintaining the state which befitted a great Abbot in his own lodging.[3] Meanwhile, he found plenty to occupy him. Under the rule of his predecessor, discipline had fallen somewhat below the high standard customary at St. Albans; and Richard determined to hold a leisurely and careful visitation of his own House, extending over the space of more than three years. As a guide to the standard which he considered suitable, he compiled a treatise of the statutes which had been passed in the general Chapters of the Benedictine Order as well as the constitutions promulgated by the legates Otto and Ottobon. He then proceeded to publish his articles of visitation and to make his inquiries. The general state of discipline was satisfactory, but there were one or two instances of offences peculiarly abhorrent to the monastic

[1] "Gesta," ii. 186. [2] *Ibid.* 191. [3] "C.P.R.," 6 Feb., 1329.

sentiment of the time, namely, carnal lapse, and the possession of private property. The reform of discipline was carried on with great vigour, despite the poor health of the Abbot. Indeed, the strictness of his rule seemed inclined to produce insubordination among the younger and rasher brethren. By the mingled tact and firmness of the Abbot, however, matters were smoothed over, and in a short time he became free to turn his attention to the cells. These he visited, some in person, and some by deputy, and then, convoking a general Chapter of the congregation of St. Albans, he promulgated a set of constitutions designed not only to guide the conduct of the brethren in the Abbey and in the cells, but also to deal with such questions as the residence of vicars in impropriated churches, and the regulation of their stipends.[1]

Abbot Richard's activities were not limited to regulating the spiritual welfare of those under his charge. He made a personal inspection of many of his manors: he restored the farm buildings: he audited the accounts of the bailiffs: and made many changes in the Abbey servants. He conducted inquisitions into the services due to the Abbey from its tenants, and took care that the full amount was rendered. Such was the skill and economy of his administration that he was able to pay off the more importunate of the creditors, and to compound with the remainder on advantageous terms.[2] Nor did he deviate one whit from his original purpose of regaining from the House the rights it had lost over the town of St. Albans. With this end in view, he accumulated funds, cultivated assiduously the friendship of those who would be able to assist him, and banished to distant cells the brethren whom he suspected of being on terms too familiar with the townsfolk. Having made all his preparations, he awaited a favourable opportunity, and then struck shrewdly.

If the townsmen had escaped for a moment from the Abbot's authority as lord of the liberty, they were still subject to his ecclesiastical jurisdiction as ordinary. Along with political freedom had come, it appears, moral laxity; and in October,

[1] "Gesta," ii. 472-82. [2] *Ibid.* 201, 208.

1330, the Abbot was able to open the campaign by excommunicating four leading citizens, and obtaining their arrest for contempt of his authority.[1] In May, 1331, matters were suddenly brought to a head by the serving of a summons for adultery upon a prominent local worthy named John Taverner. A riot broke out in which the Abbey Marshal, Walter Amundesham, slew Taverner—in self-defence, if the Abbey writers are to be trusted—and was himself lynched by the angry mob.[2] Having gained over the coroner, John of Muridene, the townsfolk proceeded to indict the Abbot and his servants for the murder of both men, gleefully relying on their privilege of excluding "foreigners" from the jury. But their benevolent design of finding the Abbot guilty of the murder of his own man was frustrated by the summons of a jury from men of the neighbouring hundreds, who had no particular animus against the Abbot, and acquitted him. It was now the turn of Richard, and the townsfolk themselves were indicted. They attempted to make terms, but the Abbot, who was respected and liked by his own freeholders and by the local gentry, found himself supported so strongly that he determined to be content with nothing less than absolute submission on the part of the burgesses. On 15 September, 1331, the justices of Traylebaston sat at St. Albans, having previously been sumptuously entertained by the prudent Abbot.[3] Eighteen of the leading townsfolk were found guilty of complicity in the death of various servants of the Abbot, and the perfidious coroner was convicted of being privy to the false accusation of the Abbot. Richard followed up this blow by bringing actions against the most prominent persons who declined to render to him his suit of multure, and then proceeded to attack the whole of the recently-acquired privileges. Against such pertinacity, supported by careful preparations, the townsmen were helpless. They surrendered, agreed to give up their charter of liberties, and to pay the Abbot £48 a year for the use of his mill.[4] Richard determined to use his victory mildly,

[1] "C.C.R.," 12 Oct., 1330.
[2] "Gesta," ii. 218.
[3] *Ibid.* 222.
[4] *Ibid.* 251.

and addressed them in terms of conciliation, but they mistook his attitude for weakness, and attempted to recede from the bargain. Whereupon he gave one of the foremost citizens a fright so severe by threats of unrelenting persecution, that the surrender took place in good earnest. Just three years after the murder of Walter the Marshal, they surrendered their muniments, their common chest, and, last of all, their hand-mills—the stones of which were set into the floor of the Abbot's parlour as a token of victory. More important still, a deputation of the townsmen, headed by the redoubtable Benedict Spichfat, came to the chancery and asked that their charter might be cancelled, and the seal defaced.[1] By a really handsome act of *amende honorable*, they asked that the silver of the seal might be used for the decoration of the shrine of St. Alban. The victory of Richard was thus complete, and the only men of St. Albans who gave him any subsequent trouble were certain tenants claiming the right of possessing handmills from time immemorial. There had been, it appears, a doubt in the mind of the royal justices, before whom the matter came up for trial, as to the Abbot's right to exact suit of multure from tenants who held no land upon which corn was grown. But the title of the House was so clear that even in this case, which seems the *reductio ad absurdum* of the privilege, the Abbot made good his claim, so that in 1334 and 1335 these tenants also were compelled to submit.[2] Having reduced the town to obedience, Richard took measures to ensure its good order. For the better keeping of the assizes, as well as for the greater efficiency of the frank pledge, the Abbot appointed four constables in each of the four wards of the town, with two chief pledges under each of them. At the same time, he took the opportunity to make some minor changes in the organization of the liberty. Every year the bailiff of the liberty had to present in writing at the Abbot's treasury his accounts of crown pleas, jail delivery, and chattels of felons. He was no longer allowed the return of writs, which was to fall to the

[1] "C.C.R.," 13 April, 1332. [2] *Ibid.* 1334 (231), 1335 (468).

seneschal's deputy.[1] The importance of this latter provision is not merely that it affords an admirable example of the business-like habits of the Abbot; it shows that the seneschal of St. Albans was already becoming what we shall find him in the next century—no mere Abbey official, but a person of rank and importance, whose duties were performed by deputy, and whose real function lay in representing the House in court circles, and keeping a guard upon its interests.

Perhaps in consequence of the expenses incurred in these struggles with the townsmen, Abbot Richard was very short of ready money; and in order to meet a demand for a fifteenth, he was compelled to levy a tallage upon his bondmen of Redburn. It is curious to find a right so archaic persisting into the middle of the fourteenth century; but the means which the tenants took to meet it show that times had changed even if the legal status of the Abbot's bondmen had remained constant. They were enterprising enough to forge a charter in support of their claim to exemption.[2] Very naturally they were detected, compelled to submit, and to pay just the same;[3] but the incident illustrates the kind of opposition the Abbey had to face in the enforcement of its old-world claims. The tenants, even the bondmen, were not creatures of straw, down-trodden serfs to obey with meekness the will of an oppressor; but rather a body of prosperous and flourishing persons, whose treatment at the hands of their lord was sufficiently humane to make them impatient of the enforcement of his legal rights.

Almost at the same time, Richard engaged in a quarrel with an opponent more formidable than his townsmen or his serfs: in 1334 he sued for and recovered a mill which had for some years been in the possession of the Queen Dowager.[4] His victory was again an achievement of no mean order; and yet in spite of these conspicuous successes, Abbot Richard was not altogether popular with his convent. His discipline

[1] "Gesta," ii. 206. [2] *Ibid.* 262.

[3] The tallage amounted to 118s. 10d., and was taken from some fifty persons; the individual contributions ranging from 40d. to 6d. Only three tenants pay nothing—"condonatur quia pauper".—"Gesta," ii. 264-6.

[4] "Gesta," ii. 267 *seq.*

was strict, his rule autocratic. The brethren complained that he spent overmuch time and money upon the scientific instruments he loved so well, especially upon his great astronomical clock "Albion". He had added fuel to the flames of discontent by touching the brethren at their tenderest point. Some time before 1333 he had been rash enough to give four books and sell thirty-two more from the precious library, which was the pride of the House, to the famous bibliophile Richard Aungerville of Bury, whose favour the Abbot hoped to win.[1] From a combination of these causes, Richard had occasional trouble with the leading obedientiaries, who considered themselves aggrieved by his autocratic attitude, and disliked his insistence upon the prompt payment of the dues they owed to each other's departments. On one occasion, when he was in the course of regulating his affairs, and desired to ascertain exactly what pittance each department owed to his Household, they took malicious pleasure in informing him that these pittances were given to the Abbot "of grace" and not "of right". Richard exclaimed "that he would rather have broken a finger than have found it so": but was wise enough to take no further action. A crisis came in 1333 when the Abbot, always sickly, was reported to be suffering from leprosy. Certain of Richard's enemies in the convent attempted to take advantage of his indisposition by complaining to the Pope that the Abbot's infirmity was intolerable, and prevented the proper discharge of his duties. The Bishop of Lincoln was appointed to look into the matter, and sent commissioners to the Abbey. In this painful position the Abbot behaved with such firmness that he won the hearts of the worthier members of the convent—if, indeed, he had ever lacked their support. At all events, they protested to the Pope that the Abbot was perfectly fit for his duties, and asked the King to interfere.[2] What was the upshot of the affair is not plain; but the only effect upon the position of the Abbot was his

[1] "Gesta," ii. 200.

[2] Cf. "C.P.L.," 1332 (509), 1333 (381). "Gesta," ii. 288.

choice of his friend Prior Nicholas Flamstead as coadjutor, to relieve him of the more arduous of his duties.

Abbot Richard stands out amongst the rulers of St. Albans as a thoroughly practical administrator of the goods of his House. Fortunately, he was not the last Abbot to exhibit this quality; but coming as he does after three abbots under whom the House approached complete bankruptcy, it is almost startling to observe the scientific care which he exercised in the custody of his temporalities. He placed the fabric in a thoroughly good state of repair: he increased the revenues by his care of the live-stock: he placed a check upon the rascality of his bailiffs. In addition to placing the finances of the House in a position of comparative security, he had recovered the liberties lost in the time of his predecessor. His nine years of rule had wrought a wonderful improvement in the condition, as well as in the reputation, of St. Albans. Needless to say, he did not satisfy every one. At times his autocratic bearing provoked resistance; and his independent attitude in matters financial was resented. In particular, he was censured for spending money upon his astronomical clock "Albion" at a time when the fabric was still dilapidated. Yet, as he explained to Edward III, who questioned him upon the subject, any one of his successors could complete his work of rebuilding the church, whereas if he did not bring the clock to a certain state of completion, no one would be able to carry on the construction when he died. The one incident of his administration that aroused universal condemnation was the aforementioned sale of the books. The brethren were inconsolable until the lost volumes had been recovered, partly by gift of the Bishop and partly by purchase from his executors.[1] But if the Abbot had temporarily deprived the House of some of its books, he put others in their place: for we are informed that he presented to the library his compositions on natural science, mathematics, and astronomy, besides his Summary of the decrees of provincial Chapters and his commentary upon the Rule.[2]

[1] "Liber de Benefactoribus," 442. [2] "Gesta," ii. 207.

Towards the end of 1335 Richard's infirmity began to grow heavy upon him, and on 23 May, 1336,[1] he died. Six days later a *conge d'élire* was obtained, and on 1 June an election was held which resulted in the choice of Michael of Mentmore. Like his predecessor, an Oxford man, he had entered religion after a distinguished academic career, and had become master of the schools at St. Albans. It was probably his fame for learning, as well as his love of discipline, that recommended him for election. Under him the Abbey became once more the pattern monastery of England, from the point of view both of culture and of good governance. After election, Michael proceeded at once to Avignon for confirmation,[2] where his piety and learning won for him notice from Benedict XII, who was just about to begin his reform of the organization of the Benedictine Order. Returning to England in February, 1337, the Abbot did homage to the King and received the restoration of his temporalities.[3]

Michael at once began to reform the discipline of the House, but hardly had he commenced his activities when he was called upon to reform the discipline of the Order. The Pope, impressed with his personality, and doubtless remembering the seniority of the Abbot of St. Albans over other English Abbots in virtue of the privilege of Hadrian IV, transmitted to Michael the series of Constitutions which he had compiled for the reform of the Houses of the Benedictine Rule. In 1338 there was held at Northampton a General Chapter of the whole English congregation; and in this assembly the reformed Constitutions were duly published by Abbot Michael. If we can judge by the story of the St. Albans writers, their Abbot, as President of successive General Chapters, was an extremely important agent in securing the efficacy of the reforming movement, zealously pressing the observance of the Constitutions in the quarters where they were most necessary.[4] Among the provisions

[1] "C.C.R.," 24 May, 336. "C.P.R.," 1336 (270). Not, as says the "Gesta" (followed by Riley), in 1335.

[2] Vidal, "Lettres communes de Benoit, XII," i. 2541.

[3] "C.P. .," 1337 (380).

[4] "Gesta," ii. 302.

destined to exercise considerable influence upon the history of Benedictinism in England was the careful restoration of the triennial Chapters, which had been allowed somewhat to decay. To secure increased efficiency, the two provinces into which the Black Monks had hitherto been divided were abolished, and it was directed that from henceforth the English congregation should meet in a single united Chapter, to be held at the standard interval of three years.

In the same year, 1338, Michael held a General Chapter of St. Albans, in which he promulgated the Constitutions of Pope Benedict, but with certain modifications which he considered desirable. The first change he made concerned the important question of diet. In regard to the eating of meat, usage was now so far relaxed that it was customary for any of the brethren, if invited by an obedientiary, to dine on meat in the Oriel. Finding it impossible to restore the old abstention from flesh, Michael regulated the use of it by ordaining that half the convent should dine in the Oriel on alternate days, so that there should be no more question of favouritism or undue partiality.[1] But it is interesting to note, as testimony to the excellent state of Abbey discipline, that the great majority of Michael's regulations were concerned with financial rather than with moral affairs. Following the example of his predecessor, the Abbot devoted much care to the organization and distribution of the revenue, being apparently convinced that the first essential of a model house was a satisfactory financial position. As a matter of fact, it was becoming increasingly difficult to make income balance expenditure, the revenue of the convent being notably inadequate.[2] In the course of his efforts to remedy this, the Abbot carefully regulated the payments due to and from the obedientiaries, pursuing the policy of commuting payments in kind for payments in money, so that it would be easier to ascertain the precise financial position of each department. With the object of increasing the general economy of management, certain readjustments in the property of the various obedientiaries were

[1] "Gesta," ii. 305. [2] *Ibid.* 308.

made.[1] But the particular solicitude of the Abbot was the well-being of the House's scholars at Oxford. At this time there were five—two more than the number to which the Abbey, from its sixty monks, was liable.[2] Michael arranged for the appointment of three receivers of revenue, whose duty it should be to collect and forward to the students their stipend of £10 per annum. It was in the time of this Abbot, apparently, that St. Albans began to maintain a separate *studium* at Gloucester College.[3] The object of this was quite as much to preserve the autonomy of the monks of the House as to increase the comfort of the students. In the existing specimens of such *studia*, which are to be seen in Worcester College, each separate monastic tenement has its roof-line at a different level from that of its neighbour, in order that there should be no possible doubt as to the limits of the property of each monastery. With the growing fame of St. Albans, therefore, it must have seemed desirable that the brethren resident at Oxford should have their own tenement, which, like a cell of the House, would be subject only to the control of St. Albans. Nor was it only the brethren living at Oxford who came under the care of Michael. He passed a series of regulations intended to make study at the Abbey at once easier and more fruitful. He arranged for the celebration of morning Mass immediately after Prime, in order that the students might be able to read and write undisturbed from the conclusion of service at 7.30 a.m. to the commencement of daily Chapter at 9 a.m. He built at his own expense a range of studies over the east walk of the cloister, and collected therein a special library for the use of students.[4] In addition to this, he presented many books to the general library of the House; and indirectly increased the revenue of the head of the scriptorium by freeing him from the charge of repairing the service books, which the sacrist had attempted

[1] "Gesta," ii. 308, 314. [2] "C.P.L.," 1349 (322). "Gesta," ii. 461.

[3] Specimens of these *studia* can still be seen in the old buildings of Worcester College, Oxford. Cf. chapter xiii. of Daniel and Barker's "History" of the College.

[4] "Gesta," ii. 302. Cf. Gasquet in "Downside Review," x. 2, 100.

to lay to his door.[1] The encouragement which Abbot Michael gave to learning did not fail to produce its effect. The activity of the St. Albans scriptorium during his rule seems attested by the learning and versatility of its principal inmate, John of Tynemouth.[2] John is best known as the author of the "Martyrologium" and "Sanctilogium," from which Capgrave in the next century drew so much of his material for the famous "Nova Legenda Angliæ". But in view of the statements sometimes made as to the apathy of the St. Albans scriptorium during the middle years of the fourteenth century,[3] it is important to remember that Tynemouth was a considerable writer of history. He composed a "Historia Aurea," which starts from the Creation, takes up Blandford's work in 1327, and goes down to the year 1347.[4] This still exists in manuscript form only. It was afterwards revised and amplified by William of Wyntershulle,[5] the author of the "Annales Ricardi II et Henrici IV," but in its original form was one of the sources of Walsingham's work. Moreover, this chronicle was continued by an unknown hand down to the year 1377,[6] and in this way the gap which has been too readily assumed to exist between the days of Blandford and Walsingham is exactly filled.[7] As a writer, John is remarkable rather for carefulness than for brilliance. He is essentially a compiler, embodying in his text valuable letters and other documents, but concerning himself little with the artistic presentation of his facts. With little critical faculty, he is a chronicler or an antiquary rather than a historian; and his work is mainly important as constituting the quarry from

[1] "Gesta," ii. 306.

[2] Tanner, "Bibliotheca," 439-40. Horstmann, "Nova Legenda Angliæ," xliv-li, lv-lxv.

[3] Tait, "John of Reading," etc., 57-62.

[4] MS. C.C.C.C. 5 and 6. MS. Bodl., 240, ff. 1-582.

[5] See note on fol. i. MS. C.C.C.C. 5, and below, p. 182.

[6] MS. C.C.C.C. 6, ff. 305-10*a*. This continuation begins with the year 1343.

[7] Dr. Horstmann has the credit of being the first to point this out. "Nova Legenda Angliæ," loc. cit.

which Walsingham drew the material displayed to such advantage in the "Historia Anglicana".[1]

Having now reorganized the House to his satisfaction, Michael turned his attention to the cells. Besides putting forward some general recommendations as to the desirability of prompt payment of dues, and as to increased caution in financial matters, he issued at great length a series of Constitutions for the regulations of the two leper hospitals of St. Julian and St. Mary des Prez. The state of the cells was on the whole satisfactory, nor did Michael encounter any opposition in the course of his reforms. There were, however, grave financial troubles in connection with certain of the cells, the management of which seems to have been unskilful. Binham was almost bankrupt, owing to the folly of William de Somerton. Tynemouth also had suffered terribly in its revenues from the depredations of the Scots, so that in February, 1341, it had to be taken into the King's hands until it was in some manner recovered.[2] In 1347, also, the Priory of Wymondham was for a short time taken into the King's hands on account of certain debts owed by the Prior, who had just died.[3] But these troubles do not seem to have affected the prosperity of the Mother House in any serious degree.

Throughout the reign of Michael taxation was heavy and frequent. Every four or five years came the demand for a tenth or a fifteenth, or both together—which in the case of St. Albans involved the payment of a lump sum of about £80.[4] But what was felt to be the heaviest drain upon the resources of the House was the expense involved in the payment of the corrodies sold for ready money in the time of preceding Abbots, and in the discharge of the various "maintenances" claimed by the King. From the Close Rolls of the years 1346-49 it seems that Edward III must have had some half-dozen of these latter. One or other of them was perpetually falling vacant from the death of the occupant, and a fresh

[1] See below.
[2] "C.P.R.," 1341 (129).
[3] *Ibid.* 1347 (404).
[4] "C.C.R.," 1339 (8).

appointment was invariably the result.[1] Abbot Michael did nothing to reform this evil, which lasted until the days of his successor.

As might have been expected from his other activities, the Abbot was a strenuous defender of the rights of his House against attack. One of the most interesting of the lawsuits in which he became involved was undertaken in opposition to one of his own tenants, a certain William atte Penne, a copyholder of Barnet. William evolved the ingenious scheme of attempting to sell the lands which he held in copyhold as though they had been freehold, forging for this purpose the necessary title deeds, and smoking them to give the requisite appearance of age. Evidently a person of no less substance than ingenuity, he gave lavish presents to the bench, and it was only with the greatest difficulty that the Abbot was able to obtain a conviction against him. Michael was greatly alarmed, the more so, as other of his tenants began to imitate the tactics of William, and to forge deeds in support of their claims to any liberties which they desired. The Abbot took vigorous action against the offenders, and the movement collapsed.[2] These and other less noteworthy lawsuits occupied the Abbot to the day of his death. Busy as he was, however, he found time to make important alterations in the fabric of the House. We have already noticed his building of the studies over the east walk of the cloister. In addition to this he finished and roofed the repaired part of the church, and rebuilt the walls of the north part of the cloister. He vaulted the south aisle of the nave, which had just been completed, and set up three new altars there. There are some indications that he contemplated the construction of a rood-screen when he died suddenly in the flower of his age.

In 1349 the plague swept through Hertfordshire with terrible violence, carrying off Abbot Michael and forty-seven

[1] "C.C.R.," 1339 (460, 461); 1342 (652). "C.P.R.," 1342 (517); 1343 (53), etc.

[2] "Gesta," ii. 319 *seq.*

of the brethren—almost five-sixths of the entire community.[1] There, in the south-east of England, the general mortality was so great that Walsingham afterwards conjectured that scarcely one-tenth of the population remained alive.[2] To add to the distress, there came a grievous murrain: "first the crops perished, then the earth remained untilled for lack of labourers". In this time of death and terror was elected the greatest Abbot who ever presided over the fortunes of St. Albans—Thomas de la Mare. Of strong character, of eminent ability, stern and just, Thomas is the most impressive figure in the history of his House. At the time of his election he was Prior of Tynemouth, having previously held the offices of Kitchener and Cellarer in the Abbey. For nine years he had ruled his distant northern cell, raising it from the bankruptcy into which it had threatened to fall to a high condition of prosperity and of renown. In the course of his rule he had gained not only valuable experience in the management of affairs, together with a great reputation for tact and firmness, but many influential friends who were afterwards to be of great assistance to him.[3] Among them was the Prince of Wales himself.

Abbot Michael had died on 12 April, 1349, and with him had perished both the Prior and the Sub-Prior. Hasty elections were made by the remnants of the convent, and all awaited with impatience the arrival of Thomas from Tynemouth. Though all appeared to rely upon his judgment he was not chosen Abbot without some hesitation, the age and sanctity of the Prior of Wymondham causing his claims to be considered first. The Prior, with commendable wisdom, refused to stand, and Thomas, as the only possible candidate, was elected unanimously without delay. He set off at once for the Curia, but such was the violence of the pestilence that he lost two of his retinue before he reached Avignon. After the usual charges he received confirmation, but fell so desperately ill that his life was given up. His vigorous constitution,

[1] "Gesta," ii. 370. "Historia Anglicana," *s.a.* 1349. "Chronicon Anglicanum," 27. Cf. Creighton, "History of Epidemics," i. 131.

[2] "Hist. Ang.," loc. cit. [3] "Gesta," ii. 370-80.

however, threw off the fever in a manner that surprised every one; he made an unexpected rally, and after lying ill for most of June returned home on 14 July. Despite all his economy the cost of the journey amounted to 1000 florins.[1]

Financial matters first claimed his attention. The immediate effect of the plague was estimated at the diminution of a fourth part of the whole revenue of the House;[2] and Thomas had to obtain Papal permission to impropriate the Church of Appleton to pay the £50 stipend of his five Oxford scholars. For his immediate expenses he levied a moderate tax upon his priors, his freeholders, and his bondmen, though, as might have been expected from the havoc wrought by the plague, the assistance he derived from this source was not very considerable.[3] The Abbot realized that before the finances of the House could be put in a satisfactory condition, the heavy occasional expenses, which usually fell all together and at the most inconvenient times, must be commuted for small regular payments that could be anticipated and provided for accordingly. This policy he pursued steadily throughout his fifty years of rule. Had one of his predecessors anticipated him in it, the Abbey would have been saved much misery. In 1350 he obtained permission to exchange the advowson of Datchett for a quit-claim of the annual pension of 100s. which the King was entitled to demand for one of his clerks on the occasion of the creation of any new Abbot of St. Albans.[4] In 1364, similarly, he obtained a release from the expensive corrody which had been granted to Edward I in return for a grant of some lands in Langley.[5] As the Abbey was heavily burdened by the arrears of the 1000 marks payable on the voidance caused by the death of the former Abbots, Thomas asked and obtained leave to pay off this debt in half-yearly instalments of 100 marks.[6] The great length of his reign—almost half a century—enabled the House to recover from the

[1] "C.P.L.," 1349 (350). [2] "C. Pet.," 1349 (171). [3] "Gesta," ii. 389.
[4] *Ibid.* iii. 119. "C.P.R.," 1350 (460-3). "C.C.R.," 1350 (222).
[5] "Gesta," iii. 113. "C.C.R.," 1364 (48).
[6] "C.P.R.," 1350 (476).

disastrous effects of the privilege accorded to John of Berkhamstead, and before his death he had placed matters on a more satisfactory footing. In September, 1380, taking advantage of the weakness of the Government during the minority of Richard II, Abbot Thomas was able to commute the payment of 1000 marks on the occasion of each vacancy for an annual payment of 50 marks.[1] At last an even greater relief was obtained for the House. After more than fifteen years of unavailing effort, during which he was exposed not only to the traditional voracity of the Roman Curia, but to a series of gross frauds practised upon him by his own agents,[2] Thomas obtained, a few weeks only before his death, a bull authorizing all future Abbots of St. Albans to refrain from presenting themselves at the Curia for confirmation.[3] The price of this great boon, which was not obtained without the intercession of Richard II, the Queen Mother, and other notable persons,[4] was the very moderate annual payment of 20 marks.[5] The result of Thomas's policy was thus to release the Abbey from those heavy occasional expenses which had done so much to cause its misfortunes in the early part of the fourteenth century.

At the commencement of Thomas's reign, however, this happy consummation of his activities was far to seek. The ravages of the pestilence among his dependents were such that while the wages of labour rose to double their former figure,[6] the old customary services could no longer suffice to till the demesne. To the Abbey, which derived much of its income from the produce of its estates, the consequences must have been disastrous. How the Abbot contrived to tide over the lean years without dispersing the community, it is difficult to

[1] "Gesta," iii. 125. "C.P.R.," 1380 (545).

[2] The letters of William Strete, the agent of St. Albans at the Curia, are obviously designed to throw dust in the Abbot's eyes. Cf. "Gesta," iii. 169, 179, 183. Strete appears to have been bribed by Laurence, the Papal Pensioner, and one Adam de Fenrother, who were defrauding the House for their own gain.

[3] "C.P.L.," 1396 (293). [4] "Gesta," iii. 146-84. [5] *Ibid.* 398.

[6] Thorold Rogers, "History of Agriculture" (1866), i. 266 *seq.*

understand. There are some indications that generous benefactors came to his assistance.[1] And it may well be that the convent for some time did not recover its full strength. In 1351 Thomas released some thirty monks of St. Albans to fill the places of parish priests of the archdeaconry who had perished; and it is possible that this would afford him with an opportunity of reducing the expenses of the House to a minimum.[2]

The domestic organization under Thomas was as excellent as his management of business affairs. His first care was always to maintain the excellent discipline of his predecessor, and to amend it in such respects as it had suffered during the recent catastrophes. He first thoroughly revised the performance of Divine service, improving the psalmody and publishing an Ordinal full of excellent regulations which he enforced with care.[3] In the course of this reform he reduced the number of Histories of Saints which had to be learnt by heart, it being found that the strain upon the memory was a serious discouragement to many earnest men desirous of entering religion. He then dealt with those points in which the discipline was always liable to break down unless the greatest care were taken—the strict observance of the silences, the correct behaviour in Chapter, and the punctual performance of official duties by the obedientiaries.[4] He also extended his activities to the cells, publishing a set of Constitutions intended for the guidance of the Priors, exhorting them to be present at the General Chapters, to be careful stewards of the property of their Houses, and to exercise due restraint in the leasing of land for money. He paid particular attention to the cell of Redbourn, which in process of time had become a kind of clergy-rest, served by members of St. Albans on light duty. As a result, discipline was sometimes rather lax, and the place was not well managed. The monks had no proper food supply, and the existing structures were ruinous and inconvenient. The Abbot took the place in hand, and his habit of retiring there

[1] "Gesta," iii. 415.
[2] "C.P.L.," 28 Feb., 1351.
[3] "Gesta," ii. 396.
[4] *Ibid.* 418-47.

for periods of quiet and study soon raised the discipline once more to a high level. Next turning his attention to St. Mary des Prez, he was able to insist that only literate nuns should henceforth be admitted, instead of the illiterate sisters who had hitherto found entrance.[1] It is plain from the general tenor of these regulations that there was nothing seriously wrong with the discipline of House or cells at the time. Thomas's activities were rather in the direction of an increased standard of excellence than of an amendment of discipline as ordinarily understood. A distinct feature of his organizing policy was his attention to the bodies as well as to the souls of those under his charge. He added materially to the comfort of the brethren by increasing, within reasonable limits, their allowances of food and drink.[2] In spite of his many occupations he made a point of supervising in person the comfort of the sick, ministering to them with his own hands. The result of this happy combination of parental discipline and fatherly care soon became manifest. If the state of St. Albans had been good under Michael, it became under Thomas a model for all England. Certain of the brethren, as might be expected, were unable to live up to the new standard, and left the House: some of them to enter other monasteries, others to adopt a secular life.[3] But the convent as a whole entered with enthusiasm into the schemes of the Abbot, supported him in every possible way, and revered him almost as a saint.

The fame of Thomas was not long in spreading beyond the confines of the St. Albans congregation. He was early hailed as the most fitting successor to Abbot Michael in the presidency of the General Chapters of the Order. His great enthusiasm, tempered by good sense, won him veneration from all and fear from not a few. With the energy and zeal which had characterized his work for his own House, he advanced to the reform of the Order in general, publishing Constitutions, and sparing neither toil nor expense in his endeavours to enforce them. Among the more noteworthy of his provisions were those dealing with the regulation of Gloucester College.

[1] "Gesta," ii. 401. [2] *Ibid.* 401. [3] *Ibid.* 415.

He reinforced the money penalty which Michael had assigned to the offence of failing to send the due number of students in proportion to the size of the House:[1] he regulated the duties of supervision belonging to the Prior of Gloucester College: and he took care to maintain the independence of the Oxford students from the control of the University authorities.[2] The respect in which Thomas was held at this time is shown by the fact that as long as he presided over the General Chapter he was able to enforce the attendance of the highly-exempted House of Christ Church, Canterbury, which his successors in the office of President were unable to do.[3] One anecdote of Thomas's presidency of the General Chapter is worth mentioning. Sharing as he did the general dislike of the regular for the mendicant orders, Abbot Thomas diligently assisted FitzRalph, Archbishop of Armagh, in his campaign against the friars. Although Thomas had his own reasons for disliking the mendicants, who had been restrained, not without much difficulty, from infringing the liberties of St. Alban, he would have been horrified if he could have foreseen that the man he was helping would be proclaimed by later ages as the "spiritual father" of the arch-heretic Wicliffe.

In consequence, doubtless, of his increasing fame as a reformer of monastic discipline, Thomas was in high favour with Edward III, and was appointed Visitor of all the Houses in the King's presentation, with plenary powers for the amendment of discipline, the correction of offences, and the chastisement of transgressors. In accordance with the royal commission directed to him, Thomas visited the Houses of Eynsham, Abingdon, and Battle, reforming the manners of the convents, and restoring the Rule to its original purity. At Reading he found the House torn with faction, and thereupon removed the ringleaders for correction to St. Albans, where doubtless they found ample opportunity to regret their temerity. Having imbued them with the spirit of the St. Albans dis-

[1] "Gesta," ii. 459. "C.C.R.," 1346 (127). [2] "Gesta," ii. 458-66.

[3] "*Ibid.* 404. Christ Church was released in 1378 from the duty of attendance.

cipline, Thomas suffered them to return from his care to their own House. Much the same policy was pursued by him at Chester, where, however, he found it necessary to remove the Abbot and to replace him by a more efficient head. At Bury St. Edmunds, a House with almost the same claims to immunity as his own, Abbot Thomas, with fine delicacy, forebore to hold a formal visitation, but took some of the brethren to learn the St. Albans discipline, encouraged the Prior to persist in his efforts at reform, and supported him vigorously.[1] This visitation of Abbot Thomas had been carried out by royal authority, and was not, therefore, one of the regular visitations ordered by the General Chapters. From time to time visitors appointed by the Northampton Assemblies came to visit St. Albans, and the event occurred so frequently that accounts of this or of that particular visitation were rarely considered worthy of preservation. In the one instance of which we have any detailed account, that of 1378,[2] the visitors, far from finding anything derogatory to the fame of St. Albans, were beyond measure astonished at the excellence of the discipline brought to light by their strict inquiries.

The effect of these activities was to raise St. Albans to the highest pitch of reputation that it had yet attained. Thomas was made a Privy Councillor, and became an intimate associate of the court circle. He was also a friend of King John of France during his captivity in England after the battle of Poitiers ; and as an illustration of the reputation in which he was held, it may be mentioned that when, fatigued with his exertions, he entertained the idea of resigning, he employed John of France as his mediator with Edward III, and was only persuaded to abandon his idea by the repeated exhortations of the Black Prince.[3]

Under the prudent administration of the Abbot, the economic condition of the House began slowly to improve. The result of the pestilence had been to throw a large amount of land into the hands of the Abbey, and to cause a consider-

[1] "Gesta," ii. 405-7. [2] "Chron. Ang.," 203.
[3] "Gesta," ii. 409.

able depreciation of the value of the manors.[1] This land was from time to time leased out by royal permission; and that the process went on upon a considerable scale seems to be indicated by the caution, noticed above, to the priors of the cells, that they were to exercise prudence in such transactions. In addition, waste land was from time to time reclaimed by royal permission, and similarly leased out,[2] and the resulting revenue distributed to the best possible advantage among the various obedientiaries. By such means the Abbey was enabled to tide over the time of crisis. Probably the fame of Abbot Thomas and the reputation he gave to the House was a valuable pecuniary asset; for we are told that many benefactors came to his assistance, and it must be supposed that St. Alban's shrine did not lack offerings.[3] In this way, it seems, the Abbey was able to avoid the necessity of permitting its bondmen to commute their labour dues for money. No trace of any manumissions can be found in the St. Albans records prior to the commencement of the fifteenth century. Such evidence as there is seems to show that the period between 1349 and 1381 was marked by little or no improvement in the condition of those who held of the Abbey by servile tenure. None the less, it is impossible to accuse the St. Albans authorities of deliberate oppression. The occasional disturbances, like that which occasioned the crenellation of the Abbey in June, 1357;[4] the ingenious attempts at forgery which have already been remarked, are proof enough that the dependents of the Abbey were not miserable, down-trodden serfs, lying bleeding and helpless beneath the feet of the oppressor, but prosperous and sturdy persons, with a good notion of their own importance, who bore their monkish masters no particular ill-will, but were impatient of the effete system represented by the St. Albans authorities.

This comes out with great clearness during the terrible week of 13-20 June, 1381. While very ready to turn to account the social disturbances, in order to better their con-

[1] "Gesta," iii. 415.
[2] "C.P.R.," 1355 (320).
[3] "Gesta," iii. 415.
[4] "C.P.R.," 1356 (493), 1357 (574).

dition, and to rid themselves of the antiquated fetters they found so irksome, the tenants of St. Albans, townsfolk and rustics alike, showed not the slightest desire to commit any outrage upon the persons of the Abbot and convent. Indeed, with the exception of one hot-headed enthusiast, William Gryndecobbe, who had his own private reasons for disliking the monks, the very townsfolk seem to have taken a pride in the Abbey and to have interfered to protect it from the attacks of "foreigners".[1] The behaviour of the men of St. Albans is in striking contrast to the murder and pillage which took place about this time at Bury St. Edmunds.[2] The orderliness and restraint of the St. Albans tenants, at any rate in comparison with the excesses perpetrated elsewhere, constitute a striking testimony to the mildness and moderation of the Abbey's sway. None the less, what did happen at St. Albans was sufficiently alarming. The townsmen came to the Abbot on the night of 13 June, and told him a rather thin tale to the effect that the London insurgents threatened to come and burn St. Albans utterly, Abbey and all, unless the inhabitants went to the metropolis to take their part in the rebellion. Thomas was either deceived, or judged it better to dissimulate, for he gave the townsmen his permission to go to London, and even sent some of the Abbey servants along with them to look after the interests of the House. They all marched off at dawn on the morning of Friday, 14 June, and arrived in London early on the same day. Some of the Abbey servants realized at a glance the extreme gravity of the situation, and sent back word that there was imminent danger to life and limb. Whereupon the Prior, and some of the less stout-hearted of the brethren, rode north to Tynemouth to be out of harm's way. But the majority of the convent, to their credit, resolved to stay by the old Abbot, who maintained the utmost calmness in this time of terror. The danger was, in fact, very real. Gryndecobbe, the one fanatical opponent of the Abbey, took the famous Wat Tyler into his counsels, and, by his advice, returned to St. Albans on Friday night. By Saturday morn-

[1] "Gesta," iii. 312. [2] Arnold, "Memorials," iii. 126-31.

ing he had made all his arrangements, and had gathered a large body of the more disreputable portion of the inhabitants of the country-side. The mob broke down fences, gave seisin of the Abbot's property, and liberated from the jail certain prisoners, one of whom they executed. Meanwhile a letter had been extorted from the distracted Government ordering the Abbot to give the townsmen the liberties he was accused of denying them. Armed with this letter, the insurgents proceeded to interview the Abbot, boasting that they could count upon the alliance of thirty-two vills in support of their claims, but offering no member of the convent any violence. With rare firmness Thomas expostulated, but recognizing at last that the more riotous portions of the mob were getting beyond the control of the moderate party, surrendered court rolls and other muniments containing records of services. These were promptly committed to the flames. The insurgents then proceeded to demand an ancient charter of liberties "of which one letter is in gold and the other in azure"—perhaps a recollection of the charter violently extorted from Abbot Hugh. The Abbot, in good faith, denied all knowledge of it, whereupon certain of the mob broke into the Abbey and tore up the pavement of millstones which Richard of Wallingford had laid down in his parlour. Fragments of these stones were distributed as relics to those present "as though it had been holy bread". After they had consumed much good cheer, prudently furnished by the Abbot, the rioters were pacified by a promise that they should be allowed to draw up their own charter, and matters were respited to the morrow. In the meanwhile, news of the death of Wat Tyler, and the advent of a letter of protection for the Abbey, caused the insurgents to modify their demeanour. None the less, they insisted on the Abbot fulfilling his promise, and granting them a charter of liberties in accordance with their own demands. With the exception of a single clause, this charter was identical in form with the grant that had been extorted from Hugh in 1327. The omission is the clause relating to representation in Parliament. This must be ascribed to the ingenious policy

of Abbot Richard. From 1301 to 1327, it seems,[1] St. Albans was represented by two burgesses, evidently selected by the Abbot, who, as lord of the liberty, paid their expenses. But in the time of Richard, when the townsmen chose their own members, the Abbot very naturally refused to pay their costs.[2] Finding that they were now responsible for the charges of their representatives, the zeal of the burgesses cooled: after 1337 no members were returned; and it is plain from the charter of 1381 that there was no desire for representation. The townsmen of St. Albans having gained their charter, it was now the turn of the rustics of the surrounding districts. The charters which they asked and obtained present the following features. The men of Barnet obtained permission to sell their land when they so desired, together with a confirmation of the King's charter of manumission: the tenants of Redburn obtained the abolition of serfdom, together with rights of hunting and fishing in their neighbourhood: the men of Watford exacted freedom of hunting, the abolition of suits of court and of multure, of toll, and of labour upon parks and bridges: the men of Rickmansworth obtained exemption from all customary dues, permission to alienate their land, and pasture at a fixed charge per head "on condition of the annual payments due and accustomed": the tenants of Tring demanded freedom from all toll.[3] Such essentially moderate demands clearly show that the tenants of St. Albans had grievances small in comparison with those that inflamed the lower classes elsewhere to deeds of revenge. It is only a matter of regret that the Abbey authorities did not see their way to complying with these requests in good earnest. But from the point of view of the convent, charters such as these violated the immemorial privileges of St. Alban. With mournful pride the Abbey historians relate how the Saint's displeasure at the surrender of his liberties caused the conventual seal bearing his image to adhere to the wax upon

[1] "Return of Members" ("Parliamentary Papers," 1878-9).
[2] "Assize Roll" 327, membrane 6. Cf. "V.C. Hist. Herts.," ii. 321.
[3] "Gesta," iii. 318-27.

which it was being impressed. Only after three successive attempts could the seal be detached from the deed of agreement.[1] The incident well illustrates the attitude adopted by Thomas and his convent towards the claims of the tenants. The charters had been extorted by violence, and were to be overthrown on the first opportunity which presented itself. The triumph of the tenants, indeed, was not to be of long duration: order was quickly restored in the metropolis. Abbot Thomas, to his credit, attempted to make terms with his men in order to avoid the interposition of the royal justices. But the townsmen, under the leadership of the fanatical Gryndecobbe, decided to rely upon their charters, and definitely refused all compromise. In consequence, Thomas was unable to prevent the coming of King Richard, on vengeance bent, accompanied by the redoubtable chief justice, Sir Robert Tresillian. The Abbot could do nothing to protect the unfortunate townsmen from the fate they had brought upon themselves; the dispute between town and abbey was now to be settled in good earnest. Fifteen of the townsmen were hanged, including Gryndecobbe, implacable to the last; and many were imprisoned.[2] An inquisition was then held which restored the Abbey to all the privileges which it had formerly enjoyed. But the worst was yet to come. Some townsmen who had ventured to remove the bodies of their friends and neighbours from the gibbet were compelled to replace the corpses with their own hands. Not until fifteen months had elapsed were the citizens allowed to bury the bones of the miserable victims: and even then they owed this tardy boon to the direct intercession of Richard's compassionate Queen, Anne of Bohemia.[3] The outlook for the tenants was now gloomy indeed; not only were the charters granted in the late disturbances entirely annulled, but they themselves had been much weakened by the failure of their own exertions. They were now far less able to resist any demands to which they might be subjected by the House than they had been

[1] "Hist. Ang.," i. 483. [2] "Gesta," i. 350. [3] "C.P.R.," 1382 (168).

before the troubles began. In grasping at the shadow of independence, they had lost the substance of freedom. For a while, indeed, the relations between the Abbey and its tenants seem to assume a bitterness hitherto unknown. We hear of cases of arson, entailing the destruction of manors, goods, and closes:[1] of threatening messages delivered by unknown hands, and of placards proclaiming speedy vengeance upon Abbot and convent. Gradually, however, affairs assumed their normal aspect. In spite of the heavy check dealt to the popular cause, the march of economic progress could not be long delayed. It is still some half-century before we hear of the manumission of bondmen in important numbers; but the old system was fast breaking down, even upon monastic estates, and early in the fifteenth century it becomes apparent that the leasing of lands has gone on apace. As less and less land was kept in the hands of the House, so did the manumission of bondmen proceed at an increasing rate. At last, in the middle of the fifteenth century, the manumission of bondmen ceases, as though there were few more to release. The fine for manumission, which at first had been entered in the margin of the record of the transaction, disappears, and at length no price is paid "as though the Abbot were only too happy to be rid of the presence of persons who had claims upon him as a landowner, but without any power on his part to exact a return to himself of commensurate advantage".[2]

The assize held by Justice Tresillian was not the only occasion on which Abbot Thomas had recourse to law to protect his rights. During the course of his brilliant administration, he was compelled to engage in suits against more than half a hundred adversaries, ranging in rank from the King and John of Gaunt to the bondmen of the House. The accounts of these manifold contests occupy much space in the pages of the Abbey writers, but for the most part deserve little notice. Past question, the most important disputes were those concerning the privilege of exemption. During the latter part of the fourteenth century the attacks

[1] "C.P.R.," 1388 (549). [2] "Registrum Johannis Whethamstede," ii. xxxv.

of the Bishops upon the exempt houses appear to have become increasingly formidable[1]—a consequence, doubtless, of the growing unpopularity of the Pope and of the regular orders. In 1369 there was a formidable contest with the Bishop of Lincoln, who, under cover of desiring to attend the obsequies of Duchess Blanche, whose body was resting at St. Albans, attempted to secure "some right in the House".[2] At last he was persuaded to give the desired guarantee of the immunities, and harmony was restored between himself and the Abbot. In 1380 there was a long and tiresome dispute with the Bishop of Norwich, who had attempted to appoint the Prior of Wymondham one of the collectors of the clerical tenth within his diocese. The quarrel passed from the shoulders of the Prior to those of Thomas, who, after protracted litigation, succeeded in defeating the Bishop, and in obtaining a royal exemption for himself and his Priors from being made taxers, assessors, or collectors, of any subsidy granted to the King.[3] Once again, privilege was amply vindicated, and the liberties of St. Alban made additionally secure. But perhaps the most interesting lawsuits in which the Abbot was engaged came off in 1374. Some land in Oxheye, which had been willed to the Abbey, was claimed by a certain Fitzjohn, who, finding himself likely to lose his case, made a feoffment of his right to the all-powerful Alice Perrers. Remarkable to relate, the effect of this was to prevent the greatest abbot in England from asserting a flawless title until after the fall of Dame Alice. Even then Thomas was not left in peace, for William de Windsor, the lady's husband, obtained a grant of the lands of which she had been possessed, and not until 1387 was the case finally settled in favour of the Abbot.[4]

This affair is particularly noteworthy as one of the incidents which have been made to account for the singular hostility displayed by the St. Albans writers to the Government during the years 1376-1400. As is well known, the later years of the fourteenth century witnessed a remarkable outburst of

[1] "Gesta," iii. 395.
[2] *Ibid.* 374.
[3] "C.P.R.," 1380 (582).
[4] "Gesta," iii. 228.

chronicle writing at St. Albans, when at other religious houses the practice of historical composition had well-nigh ceased for ever. The literary activity at St. Albans is connected with the name of Thomas Walsingham, who was superintendent of the copying room which Abbot Thomas had repaired and refurnished.[1] We have indeed seen reasons for thinking that the tradition of historical composition had never died out at St. Albans since the days of the earliest predecessors of Matthew Paris; for it is a remarkable feature of the work done at the House that there always seems to have been a store of fragmentary compilations, awaiting the hands of a Paris or of a Walsingham before taking shape as historical writing.

The works of Walsingham are so important for the history of England in general, as well as for the history of the Abbey during the reign of Abbot Thomas, that they must be considered in some detail. Some time before 1388 he compiled a "Chronica Majora," which is now lost. The next work, written or inspired by him, was the interesting compilation known as the "Scandalous Chronicle," which contains comments so bitter upon the members of the Government, particularly John of Gaunt, that it was carefully suppressed. So thoroughly was this done that it has only survived in fragmentary form. It has been printed by Sir E. M. Thompson under the title "Chronicon Angliæ"; and a comparison with the other works of Walsingham, of which it forms one of the sources, reveals the number of changes that were necessary before it could be given to the world.

It becomes at this point desirable to say a word as to the sources from which the information contained in the earlier part of the "Chronicon Angliæ" is derived. We have already had occasion to notice the work of John of Tynemouth, stretching from 1327 to 1347, and of the chronicler who continued the "Historia Aurea" from 1343 to 1377: we have seen that there was no interruption of historical work at St. Albans between the days of Blandford and of Walsingham. We shall not therefore be tempted to imagine that Walsingham had

[1] "Gesta," iii. 393.

to look very far for the history of the years 1327-77 when the "Chronicon Angliæ" was being composed. And we are preserved from the error into which Mr. Hog, the editor of Murimuth, fell when he assumed that Walsingham borrowed from John Malvern, the continuator of Murimuth's "Continuatio Chronicorum". The resemblance between the work of Malvern and certain parts of the "Chronicon Angliæ" is indeed very striking: but it might have been supposed that all the signs of learned activity which characterize the life at St. Albans during the fourteenth century would have sufficed to prevent Mr. Hog from assuming that "Walsingham has transferred and enlarged nearly the whole text" of Malvern.[1] Mr. Riley, however, who, like Mr. Hog, knew little of Tynemouth's historical work, was not deceived. He had no doubt "that the compiler of the continuation has been indebted to the St. Albans volume *or its immediate sources*,[2] and not the St. Albans volume to the Continuator".[3] Indeed, as has been pointed out by Dr. Horstmann, the work of Tynemouth was known to, and was utilized by, John Malvern. It is, therefore, strange to find Professor Tait in his recent edition of "John of Reading" reverting to Mr. Hog's view,[4] ignoring Dr. Horstmann's arguments, and attempting to prove that the "Chronicon Angliæ" borrows wholesale from Malvern and Reading. He certainly shows that there was a very intimate connection between the continuator of Murimuth and the "Chronicon," but, naturally enough, does not succeed in establishing the obligation of the latter to the former. Even if we did not know the names of any historians of the House between the time of Blandford and the time of Walsingham, we should be justified in concluding that the encouragement given to study, the expenditure upon the library, the care for the scholar monks at Oxford, are all signs of a zeal for learning which makes it inconceivable that the tradition of historical composition should have been allowed to fall into complete

[1] "Adam of Murimuth" (Eng. Hist. Soc.), p. 175. [2] The italics are mine.
[3] Walsingham, "Hist. Ang.," R.S., i. xxii.
[4] "John of Reading" (Manchester University Press), pp. 57-62.

oblivion for three-quarters of a century, as Professor Tait seems to think.

Next in order of time came the "Gesta Abbatum Monasterii S. Albani," to which reference has so often been made. This represents a worked-up continuation of Paris' "Vitæ XXIII Abbatum". From 1308 to its conclusion in 1390, it is the composition of Walsingham himself. His intention was probably to bring it down to the death of Thomas in 1396, but his promotion to the office of Prior of Wymondham in 1394 interfered with his literary activities. The "Gesta" had to be entrusted to a continuator, probably one of the pupils of Walsingham, who occupied the scriptorium in place of his master. It was the promotion of Walsingham also, it seems, which interfered with the completion of what is called the "St. Albans Chronicle"[1]—the first attempt to render the "Scandalous Chronicle" less offensive. Upon the basis of this chronicle is founded the most famous of Walsingham's works, the "Historia Anglicana," which extends from 1272 to 1422. It has been maintained with some plausibility that the last thirty years of the work show signs of having been related by other pens than that of Walsingham. This may well be the case. That there was a great deal of historical writing going on at St. Albans, in addition to that produced by Walsingham, is past question. Specimens of the work produced by other members of the scriptorium are available in the important "Annales Ricardi II et Henrici IV," ascribed to William of Wyntershulle,[2] who also revised and amplified the "Historia Aurea" of Tynemouth, and in the various continuations which carry the "Gesta" down to 1401. The last work of Walsingham, the "Ypodigma Neustriæ," is a short abridgment of the "Historia Anglicana," compiled for the benefit of Henry V, who desired in summary form an account of the political history of England in times past.

In all these compositions to which the St. Albans scriptorium gave birth, the independence of attitude displayed by the writers

[1] Brit. Mus. "Royal MS.," 13, E. ix. ff. 177-326.

[2] Trokelowe, R.S., xxi. Cf. MS. 5 C.C.C.C., fol. i. note.

is very noteworthy. It seems in some measure at any rate to be the result of a proud consciousness of the part played by the House in the sphere of society and of culture. The aged Abbot Thomas, "monachorum patriarcha, totius monasticæ religionis pater et speculum,"[1] lent dignity to all with which he was concerned. The fame of St. Albans discipline, the lavishness of its hospitality, the breadth of its culture, combined to give it a position unique in England. In addition to his early and unremitting care for the well-being of the Oxford students, and for the success of Walsingham's labours in the scriptorium, the Abbot was at great pains to increase the number of books available for study, both in his private library and in the library of the convent. In the time of Thomas, indeed, the books of the House began to outgrow the accommodation for them, so that the next Abbot was fain to build a library to relieve the overcrowding of the cloister-presses, when death cut short his design. From all these causes, as it seems, the Abbey at the close of the fourteenth century had attained the very zenith of its career. From their desks in its scriptorium, the chroniclers dealt out chastisement with unsparing pens to those who seemed to be enemies of the House. They hated John of Gaunt for his enmity to the clergy, for his friendship for Alice Perrers, for his protection of all foes of the Church. They hated Richard for his fickleness, his childish rage, his feeble attempts to exalt his favourite House of Westminster above their own foundation. Above all others did they hate Wicliffe, whose strictures upon the regular life cut deep to the root of all they held in reverence. To Chaucer's good-humoured satire upon the self-indulgence of the monks, they could hold up the exemplary state of their own House. To Langland's fierce prophecy of the days when

> ther shal come a kyng
> and confess yow religiouses
> and bete yow as the Bible telleth

they could turn a deaf ear as to the ravings of an idle dreamer. But to Wicliffe's sober scholarly attacks upon the Papal

[1] "Annales Ricardi II et Henrici IV," R.S., 195.

supremacy, to his open proclamation of the superiority of life in the world over "the fugitive and cloistered virtue" that comes of dwelling within monastic precincts, they could oppose nothing more effective than abuse. The St. Albans writers seem almost to have constituted themselves the champions of the regular clergy against the new-fangled ideas of reform, so bitterly do they blacken the name of Wicliffe. As "Wyk-belief," the angel of Satan, the unspeakable anti-Christ, the inspirer of sedition, the blasphemer whose minions thirst for the blood of the Church, he is handed down for the horror of posterity in the "Historia Anglicana". Yet though the Abbey was great, and Wicliffe lowly, though the Regulars were strong and the Lollards weak, though temporal and spiritual forces combined to crush anything like heterodoxy, none the less the movement initiated by Wicliffe contained the germs of vigorous life, while the Abbey, for all its glory, contained at that very time the seeds of decay and death.

Indeed, despite the greatness of St. Albans at the end of the fourteenth century, despite the intelligent administration of Abbot Thomas, all was not well with the House. The economic condition was unstable. The arguments addressed by the Abbot to the Curia in support of his petition that future Abbots might be released from the duty of waiting on the Pope to secure confirmation, show clearly that the resources of the House, however well managed, were intrinsically insufficient to support the great position it had attained. The total revenue at this time was £1053 8s. 6¼d., which, if it shows a certain increase upon that of the Taxatio of Nicholas IV, was plainly insufficient to cover the additional expense consequent upon the increased dignity of the Abbey—especially in the time of high prices. Of this sum £465 5s. 8½d. belonged to the Abbot, and £584 2s. 9¾d. to the convent. From the latter sum there had to be deducted £41 10s. 5d. for the sacrist, and £51 10s. 3d. for the almoner. This left only £495 1s. 1¾d. for the support of some sixty brethren throughout the entire year.[1] The main charge upon the House, as

[1] "Gesta," iii. 149. Cf. "C.P.L.," 1396 (293).

appears from the same statement, was the hospitality which, partly perhaps from its fame, partly also from its situation, constituted a burden too heavy to bear. Evidently this hospitality was no longer, as once it had been, a source of profit. Those who visited the place were no longer pilgrims, eager to lay before the shrine of St. Alban oblations whose value more than compensated the House for any entertainment it might afford, so much as lords and merchants, passing and repassing along the great highway, claiming hospitality as a matter of right, rarely deigning to offer more than a perfunctory gift to the House. Nor was it possible to gain any help from the cells, which, in addition to involving the House from time to time in troublesome and expensive lawsuits, were too poor themselves to afford it any assistance. In the time of Thomas's successor, the cells of Beaulieu, Belvoir, and Hatfield were so deeply in debt that it was impossible for them to take a share in the burden of the Abbey: already, in the time of Thomas himself, the Chapel of St. Julian had been impropriated,[1] and the cell of Tynemouth was so decayed through Scots forays that the help of the King had to be invoked for its repair.[2] Nor did taxation show any signs of growing less burdensome. The expenses of the French wars, and the rise in prices compelled the Government to have frequent recourse to the subsidies of the clergy. Every few years there comes a demand for a tenth or a fifteenth to add to the other burdens of the impoverished House.

In a word, the resources of the Abbey were insufficient for the part which it was called upon to play. The revenues from the estates, as appears from Abbot Thomas's petition, did not suffice to pay the working expenses: the revenue from the offerings of the pious was naturally decreasing with the growing unpopularity of the regular orders, and the increasing hardness and materialism which characterized the fifteenth century. There remained but one means of making the revenue keep pace with the expenditure—to impropriate the churches in the

[1] "C.P.R.," 1396 (24). [2] *Ibid.* 1390 (194).

gift of the House, and to rent out the tithes thus set free.[1] This process, as has been noticed, had begun on some scale early in the fourteenth century; it went on more rapidly as the century drew to a close, and in the fifteenth century it was almost complete. The importance it assumed during that period is indicated by the astonishingly large space in the Abbey registers devoted to records of transactions connected with the granting out of tithes and the gifts of presentations to various persons. At the time of the Dissolution, as will be noticed below, the proceeds of the impropriated churches were bringing in almost a third of the total revenue. It is plain, however, that a time must have been attained when it was no longer possible to increase the revenue of the House in this way. When the great tithes of the most valuable churches had been converted into a source of profit to the House, it was impossible materially to increase the revenue by any further impropriations. And then the income could no longer keep pace with the expenditure. As a result the House, to relieve the momentary pressure, was from time to time driven to the disastrous course of letting out its lands on long leases. The payments for these leases commonly took the form of a large lump sum, and a small annual quit-rent. The large sum was quickly spent, and the House was left with nothing but a small annual payment, frequently utterly disproportionate to the value of the estate. It is important to bear this fact in mind, because the financial distress which characterized the last century of the history of the Abbey did not proceed directly from any loss of revenue due to the breakdown of the manorial system upon the estates of the Abbey; up to the last such lands as the House retained in its own hands seem to have borne their full share of the expenses. But they can never have sustained the whole burden at any time; and while the expenditure of the House, owing to the steady rise in prices, was on the increase, the income from the estates remained constant, or nearly constant, while the additional source of income, the offerings of the pious at the shrines of

[1] "Gesta," iii. 436.

SS. Alban and Amphibalus dwindled until the over-burdened estates were left the onus of providing the whole revenue. The finances of the House, therefore, became more and more involved as the fifteenth century proceeded.

With this preliminary explanation, we can advance to the consideration of the last complete century the Abbey was to witness.

CHAPTER X.

THE ABBEY IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY.

In September, 1396, died Abbot Thomas, amid the lamentations of the House. For the last few years of his life he had left the direction of affairs mainly in the hands of the Prior, John Moot; and it was plain that John was the obvious candidate for the vacant office. The *congé d'élire* was obtained on 18 September,[1] and the election took place on 9 October. There had apparently been some canvassing on the part of John's supporters, and the election, which was unanimous, was marked by some small departures from the ordinary procedure —to the immense indignation of the continuator of the "Gesta," who obviously disliked the new Abbot.[2] No confirmation was now necessary, thanks to the new privilege obtained by Thomas; and after obtaining royal assent, John celebrated his installation feast with due magnificence on 23 November.

The principal interest of the reign of John lies in the curious intimacy of connection between the history of the House and of the kingdom in general during these few years. As has been noticed above, Richard was disliked by the House, both on account of certain ill-turns done to it[3] and on account of his injudicious support of St. Peter's, Westminster.[4] There had been some jealousy between the two foundations for a long time, and this was brought to a head by a contest as to precedence in Parliament. As long as Thomas de la Mare continued hale and vigorous, the Abbot of Westminster had to be content with second place.[5] For the ten years before his death, however, Thomas had been infirm, and the Abbot of

[1] "C.P.R.," 1396 (25).
[2] "Gesta," iii. 457-65.
[3] "Annales Ricardi II et Henrici IV," 244.
[4] "Gesta," iii. 435.
[5] "Rot. Parl.," vol. ii. *passim*.

Westminster, William of Colchester, was able to obtain the coveted dignity in the absence of his rival of St. Albans. After the election of John Moot, St. Albans again took precedence, despite the efforts of the Abbot of Westminster.[1] The dispute was taken before Richard II, and Abbot John displayed the bulls of Adrian IV and Honorius III on which he based his claim. The King was displeased, and, jealous for the honour of his favourite House, ordered the Abbot of St. Albans to share the upper seat with his rival. Abbot John was shown so clearly that he was a *persona non grata* that he absented himself from the remaining Parliament of the reign; and his relations with the King are indicated by the notice that "he gave to King Richard for the purpose of preserving his goodwill and avoiding his malice, at different times, £126 13s. 4d."[2] It is not, therefore, surprising to find that Abbot John appears as one of the trusted supporters of Henry IV in the revolution of 1399. Not only was he appointed one of the examiners of Bills in the October Parliament,[3] but he was also entrusted with the safe custody of the Bishop of Carlisle after the arrest of the latter by command of the King.[4] Moreover, by the special request of Henry, Abbot John was one of the few witnesses of the midnight burial of his enemy, the unfortunate Richard.[5] Doubtless royal favour would have secured for St. Albans its former precedence in any event; but the matter was hastened by King Henry's displeasure at the treasonous practices of the Abbot of Westminster. And from the moment of the failure of the first great conspiracy against the new dynasty, the seniority of Abbot John in Parliament was never called in question.

In his domestic administration the Abbot was energetic and skilful, though hardly as prudent as the financial situation of the House demanded. Magnificent as had been the state maintained by Abbot Thomas, he had carefully abstained from embarking upon any considerable building operations. That

[1] "Rot. Parl.," vol. iii. 438.
[2] "Gesta," iii. 454.
[3] "Annales Ricardi II et Henrici IV," 312.
[4] *Ibid.* 314.
[5] *Ibid.* 331. "Hist. Ang.," ii. 446.

which had gone on in his time was insignificant in bulk, and mainly a product of his later years, when the conduct of affairs was in the hands of John Moot. When John became Abbot, however, he did not imitate the caution of his great predecessor, but spent much money on the partial construction of a magnificent country house at Tyttenhangre. He also rebuilt two parts of the cloister, and began to rebuild the *studium* at Oxford.[1] By an unfortunate coincidence, there was a succession of bad harvests in the very midst of these operations, so that the convent was hard put to it to find means of adequate maintenance. The brethren naturally grumbled and relations between Abbot and convent grew strained. Not content with arousing the indignation of the convent of St. Albans, John must needs render himself unpopular with the priors of the cells, by compelling them to contribute 35 marks out of the 70 marks due every year to the Pope and to the King under the new arrangements. Tynemouth had to contribute £7, Wymondham £5, Binham £4, Wallingford and Belvoir £2 each, Hatfield and Hertford £1 10s., and Beaulieu 6s. 8d. These payments were moderate enough, and it is not at first sight easy to explain the grumblings of the priors, in light of the fact that they had always been compelled to contribute to the far more onerous charges of which these small annual payments were the commutation.[2] They seem, however, to have feared that if once they acknowledged the right of the Mother House to exact a regular contribution, however moderate in amount, the burden would little by little increase until it became intolerable. As it was, John was able to enforce his contribution, but it was the source of so much ill-feeling that his successor next-but-one was compelled to agree to a compromise.

In the ecclesiastical sphere John sustained the reputation of the House in an adequate manner. He was appointed visitor of all the monasteries of the diocese of Lincoln, though he performed the office by deputy.[3] He maintained inviolate the privileges of the House in a struggle with Henry Beaufort, Bishop of Lincoln, who attempted, though without success,

[1] "Gesta," iii. 447. [2] *Ibid.* 469. [3] *Ibid.* 448.

to call in question the right of exemption. But though the Abbot sustained no loss of dignity in such contests as this, and though in the main he succeeded in the enterprises which he undertook, he was not popular with his convent. Probably he suffered by comparison with his great predecessor: certainly his injudicious building operations did not add to the esteem in which he was held by the brethren. His death in November, 1401, excited little regret. The meeting of the Chapter to elect a successor to him was held on 12 December, and is connected with a curious attempt on the part of the King to secure the election of a candidate who had invited his intervention.[1] But the convent was resolved that its freedom should not be interfered with, and the machinations of the wire-puller were effectually thwarted by abandoning the ancient form of election by compromise in favour of election by scrutiny. As a result, William Heyworth the cellarer, a young and very able man, was elected in the room of John. Contrary to the apprehensions of many, King Henry made not the slightest difficulty in accepting the choice of the convent.[2] Probably he had no real interest in the election, and had only interfered out of goodwill to the candidate he had put forward—evidently a man with friends at court.[3]

Abbot William found the House greatly in debt, owing to the extravagance of his predecessor. He therefore adopted the expedient which had commended itself long ago to Richard of Wallingford, and left St. Albans to live abroad in strict economy at the cells of Binham, Hatfield, and Belvoir, the poverty of which was such that he was required to keep up little state while in residence. Evidently a man of tact, he persuaded the creditors of the House to allow him plenty of respite in order that the debts might be paid in full. Pressed as he was by want of money, he won golden opinions by forbearing to accept any contributions towards his expenses either from the convent or from the cells. His policy of retrenchment, pursued consistently, met with great success. The House was soon free from the most onerous of its burdens, and William

[1] "Gesta," iii. 476-7. [2] "C.P.R.," 1401 (26). [3] "Gesta," iii. 492.

was able to pay his share of certain expenses which he could probably have declined had he so desired. In 1403 he was able to furnish the King with 100 marks towards his pressing necessities; and three years later he volunteered a contribution towards the expenses of the Papal nuncios then visiting England.[1] He was even able to complete the mansion of Tyttenhangre, left unfinished by his predecessor, and to finish the roofing of the cloister, begun in the reign of the same Abbot.[2] Abbot William, in addition to his genius for practical affairs, was a great lover of learning. He continued the work of his predecessor upon the Oxford residence of the St. Albans students, until it became the best in Gloucester College.[3] Even more important was the impetus he gave to literary pursuits at home. During his time a large amount of historical writing went on in the scriptorium. In 1409 he recalled Thomas Walsingham, and bade him engage once more upon his labours for learning.[4] There was also much work independent of Walsingham going on about this time. The "Annales Ricardi II et Henrici IV" seem to have been composed during the abbacy of William,[5] as does also the latest of the continuations of the "Gesta". The compilation which was to take final shape as the "Historia Anglorum" was also in process of completion: and the "Scandalous Chronicle" was being carefully revised into a more cautious and less outspoken history. The frequent occurrence of the notes "cave quia offendiculum" and "offendiculum" in the margin of Cotton MS. Otho C ii. indicates the minuteness with which this process was being carried out. In short, the reign of William was noteworthy for the great activity displayed by the inmates of the scriptorium.

In addition to the usual lawsuits waged on behalf of the privileges of his House,[6] there were some occurrences of more general interest during the time of Heyworth. Perhaps be-

[1] "Annales Ricardi II et Henrici IV," 374.
[2] *Ibid.* 417.
[3] "Registrum Johannis Whethamstede," i. 452.
[4] "Gesta," iii. 436.
[5] "Annales Ricardi II et Henrici IV," xxiii.
[6] "Gesta," iii. 505. "Registrum Johannis Whethamstede" i. 451.

cause of the unfriendly relations which for the years immediately succeeding the Revolt obtained between the Abbot and his tenants, the liberty was at this time a hotbed of Lollardy. Several times during the reign of William the St. Albans authorities received a severe fright. In 1414, after the dispersal of the meeting in St. Giles' fields, the rumour went round that the conspirators had declared their intention of destroying St. Albans on the first opportunity.[1] Credit was lent to the report by the discovery that one of the conspirators, a Dunstable man named William Murlee, possessed a Roll containing the names of all the monks of the House.[2] In 1416, moreover, occurred one of those mysterious showers of Lollard tracts which from time to time troubled the orthodox during the fifteenth century. No one could account for their distribution, and their authorship was unknown.[3] To the horror of the brethren, St. Albans was one of the places where the tracts were most widely distributed. But perhaps the most startling incident occurred in connection with the leader of the Lollards, Sir John Oldcastle. When he was in hiding during the year 1417 he concealed himself in the immediate neighbourhood of St. Albans, and found there plenty of friends. Some of his confidants were captured by the Abbot's men, and his place of hiding was revealed. To the great indignation of the convent many English books were discovered in his retreat, and also several Latin service books, which, with a curious anticipation of Reformation vandalism, had been cut and mutilated in various ways.[4] It is hardly surprising to find that in the same year Abbot William had trouble with his men of Barnet, who, possibly in consequence of the Lollard teaching at their doors, experienced a sudden recurrence of their desire for liberty. They leagued themselves together, and refused to render the services due from them.[5] But the resistance was effectually repressed by the intervention of the justices of Oyer and Terminer, and there was no further trouble.

Unfortunately for the Abbey, William's prudent adminis-

[1] "Historia Anglicana," ii. 298-9. [2] "Ypodigma Neustriæ," 447-9.
[3] *Ibid.* 472. [4] *Ibid.* 483. [5] "C.P.R.," 1417 (87, 143).

tration gained him notice beyond its walls, and in 1419 he was provided by the Pope to the See of Lichfield.[1] Perhaps with the intention of making things easier for his successor, William did not enter upon his new sphere of activities until some time in 1420; and only in August of that year was the new Abbot elected. John Wheathamstede, sometimes called by his family name of Bostok, had been Prior of Gloucester College. His connection with St. Albans is possibly in some measure due to the fact that his uncle and namesake John Wheathamstede was Prior of the cell of Tynemouth.[2] The younger John was a man of commanding presence, of great ability; a famous scholar and churchman, with a reputation for fine writing which modern taste finds hard to understand. He presents a very dignified figure in the somewhat trivial annals of St. Albans during the fifteenth century, and in his time the House experienced some faint return of the glory which it had enjoyed under De la Mare. Once again did Kings, Princes, Dukes, and Bishops find shelter within the stately guest-hall; once more did the Abbot of St. Albans find admission to the counsels of the greatest in the land. The advice of John Wheathamstede appears to have been valued alike by Henry Beaufort, Bishop of Winchester, and by his nephew and rival, Duke Humphrey of Gloucester.[3] The latter, indeed, was a constant visitor to the House, and one of its most liberal benefactors. Among the other illustrious visitors who frequently resorted to the Abbey were the King himself, his mother, the Queen Dowager Joanna, the Duke and Duchess of Bedford, the Earl of Warwick, Edmund Mortimer. The reputation of the House in 1423 is shown by the fact that the Abbot was appointed one of the proctors of the English Benedictines at the Council of Pavia. In 1431, again, he was invited to assume the same office in the Council of Basel, though for some reason unknown he does not seem to have attended until 1433.[4]

[1] "C.P.L.," 1419 (134).

[2] Uncle and nephew have been confounded into one and the same person by Dugdale, Newcome, and Clutterbuck. Chronological reasons alone reveal the absurdity of the identification.

[3] "Registrum Johannis Amundesham," i. xv.

[4] "Rymer," x. 550.

In the place he held in the circle of the fashionable world, Abbot Wheathamstede may be compared, not unjustly, with Abbot Thomas himself.

Abbot John was a good disciplinarian, which was more than could be said for many of his brother prelates at the time. He took a leading part in the attempted reform of the Benedictine Order by royal authority, which marked the last days of Henry V. A General Chapter of the Order was held at Westminster by the King's command: and Henry himself attended. He exhorted the assembled monks to amend their ways, and to revert to the piety and simplicity of early times. By his advice certain disciplinary canons, drawn up by the Abbot of St. Albans and other Heads of Houses, were approved, confirmed in a subsequent meeting, and presented to the Pope for his endorsement.[1] Yet the whole temper of the age was opposed to the spirit, if not to the letter, of the monastic rule. A radical reform of discipline was quite impossible, if only for the reason that the necessary enthusiasm, if not the necessary energy, was lacking. Even in his own House, John, strong man though he was, found it impossible to have matters as he would have liked them. The regulations which he enounced for the guidance of the brethren on the eve of his departure for the Council of Pavia reveal among the members of the convent a spirit different from that which had called forth the regulations of past abbots. There were no great faults to be found, far less any moral evils, but there was a general atmosphere of carelessness and unwillingness to take trouble over the details of Divine service, which revealed among the brethren an apathy hitherto unknown in the history of the Abbey.[2] The brethren were warned to avoid loitering conversation with women: were forbidden to indulge in horseplay: and cautioned not to be seen drinking when duty called them to cloister or to dortoir. Particularly noticeable was the relaxed state of discipline at Redburn, which was now considered to be little more than a country house for the

[1] "Historia Anglicana," ii. 337-8.

[2] "Registrum Johannis Amundesham," i. 102-15.

relaxation of the brethren. The regularity of Divine service had been intermitted; the monks on duty there, sometimes only one or two together, sat up too late, and slept too long, whereby the reputation of the cell suffered. Moreover, for some little time, there had been a steady increase in the standard of luxury demanded by the brethren. In the time of John Moot, contrary to the Rule, monks had been allowed to wander into the fields for relaxation. At the same time the length of the Lenten services had been reduced.[1] Abbot Wheathamstede provided a further illustration of the movement towards increasing comfort by obtaining a bull limiting Lenten fasting, by providing better Sunday suppers, and by increasing the delicacy of the food allowed to the novices.[2] The mildness of John was indeed based on sound sense; it became plain than any attempt to increase the severity of the Rule would result in a number of desertions. As it was, the attempts of John to reform the discipline in certain particulars obliged him to exact a new and stringent oath from all monks making profession, to the effect that they would not procure their transference to any other house save with the express leave and permission of their superior.[3]

When the Abbot came to deal with the cells, he found that the state of them was less satisfactory than that of the Mother House. At the beginning of his reign he had found it advisable to modify the financial arrangement made by John Moot, since the Priors, far from becoming reconciled to the exaction, protested ever more vigorously as time went on. The reluctance of the cells to bear this very moderate burden, incurred in a benefit which they all shared, seems to show that they were somewhat lacking in loyalty to the Mother House.[4] And the result of John's visitation of Binham and Wymondham in 1425-6, proves that with these cells, at all events, things were not well. The series of searching questions to which the inmates were subjected is very curious: whether Mass is celebrated once a day: whether the vow of chastity is observed:

[1] "Gesta," iii. 471.
[2] "Registrum Johannis Amundesham," i. 183.
[3] *Ibid.* 97.
[4] *Ibid.* 85.

whether any of the brethren engage in worldly business without the consent of their superior: whether there are any monks who despise cloister and choir, but who "reverence the theatre, honour the palace, and hold in affection dainty food".[1] The Abbot was dissatisfied with the results of the visitation, and a new oath was imposed upon the Priors; but there is nothing to show that there was any grave scandal. None the less, the tenor of such questions as those addressed to the inmates of Binham and Wymondham certainly seems to indicate that discipline had become somewhat relaxed in these Houses. The state of Tynemouth was far more reassuring; probably the fact that it was a refuge for the country-side in case of a Scots foray,[2] brought it into prominence, and prevented much slackness on the part of the brethren. The Abbot's suggestions for the improvement of the House were mainly confined to advice as to the best way of improving the singing, and as to the more economical distribution of the revenue among the obedientiaries.[3] With the little cell of Beaulieu the case was different. Always impecunious, it was now bankrupt owing to the steady rise in prices. While there were no faults to be found with its inmates, and no signs of evil in their lives, it was yet so small and so feeble as to be useless. In 1435 Abbot John suppressed it, and applied its revenues to the augmentation of the stipends of the House's scholars at Oxford.[4]

From the results of John's visitations of Abbey and cells it appears that the discipline of the St. Albans congregation, despite the strenuous activities of successive Abbots, had been growing less and less strict. A curious confirmation of this is to be found in 1429, when Simon Winter, an Augustine attached to the Brigittine House of Sion, obtained Papal license to transfer himself to St. Albans, as he was too ill to sustain the discipline of his own House.[5] Evidently in the

[1] "Registrum Johannis Amundesham," i. 206-7.
[2] Cf. "C.P.R.," 1390 (194).
[3] "Registrum Johannis Amundesham." i. 212, 219.
[4] *Ibid.* ii. 105-12.
[5] "C.P.L.," 1429 (174).

period which had elapsed between the death of De la Mare and the date of this transaction, a change had come over the spirit of the Abbey discipline. Even more striking evidence that St. Albans had fallen from its proud position as a pattern monastery is afforded by the ill-success of Abbot Wheathamstede's attempts to reform the cell of Redburn in 1439.[1] He put forward a series of constitutions to the effect that daily service should be celebrated: that immoderate feastings and potations should not be carried on late at night: that suspicious persons were not to be introduced within the precincts: that leisure hours were to be occupied in a seemly manner. But the Convent of St. Albans vigorously protested at this attempt to restore order to their place of relaxation, and though the Abbot could, as far as the letter of his authority went, have enacted these regulations even in the teeth of the convent, he was far too sensible a man to do anything of the kind. The days were gone by when the convent could be reformed against its will; either John must secure the co-operation of the brethren, or, as he well knew, his efforts would be useless. With sorrow he decided to abandon the proposed reform.[2] It must not be supposed, however, that there was the slightest breath of scandal connected with the Abbey. A House under the personal direction of the stately Wheathamstede, a House beloved especially of the saintly Henry VI, ever jealous for the good repute of the exempt monasteries,[3] could not have harboured any flagrant abuses. None the less, the seeds of such abuses were present, and it remained to be seen whether they would come to fruition.

The decline in the discipline of the House was hardly the fault of Wheathamstede, who was ever on the watch to correct shortcomings and to admonish offenders. In 1426-7 Abbot John held a synod of the clergy in his archdeaconry, and it became manifest that there were grave defects in the conduct of the secular clergy. The vicars placed in charge of the impropriated churches, often, it must be supposed, with a pittance

[1] "Registrum Johannis Amundesham," ii. 203-11.

[2] *Ibid.* 212.

[3] Cf. "Correspondence of Bekynton," R.S.

barely sufficing for their needs, had been in the habit of absenting themselves from their cures to a scandalous degree.[1] As might have been expected, such conduct did much to strengthen the already strong hold which Lollardy had obtained on the district. In the course of his inquisition the Abbot found it necessary to pass severe ordinances against those who preached without licence, and those who possessed books in the vernacular.[2] Severe and degrading penalties were inflicted upon certain unfortunates convicted of heresy. But, in addition, John did something to remedy the unsatisfactory state of the seculars by enforcing upon all vicars a stringent oath against absenteeism.

John's strenuous efforts to reform the discipline of the House seem to have won him respect, as his social standing won him reputation. He also had no mean ideas of business; in fact, from the point of view of the convent, his chief recommendation appears to have been his excellent management of the finances of the House. He hastened to make full use of a privilege, formerly granted by Boniface IX, of letting out the lands of the Abbey at a money rent.[3] He followed the policy of Thomas in enclosing the waste ground for cultivation,[4] or, as happened in most cases, for pasture land. He carried to its logical conclusion the policy of impropriating churches to the use of the House, by leasing the tithes to laymen, thereby saving much in the expenses of collection.[5] As the century proceeded the Abbey kept less and less of its land in its own hands, preferring to farm out tithes, demesne, and manors to tenants for a money rent. These tenants, as a somewhat picturesque contemporary account informs us, were divided into three classes. First came the courtiers, turbulent, and ever ready to deny the dues of the Church; secondly, the lawyers, wily and difficult to bring to book; thirdly, the knights and the noblemen, readier with threats than with rents.[6] An examination of the many disputes in which the Abbot was engaged reveals the substantial

[1] "Registrum Johannis Amundesham," i. 223. [2] *Ibid.* 224-5. [3] *Ibid.* 155, 163.
[4] *Ibid.* 260. [5] *Ibid.* [6] "Registrum Johannis Whethamstede," i. 189-90.

truth of this classification. John found himself constantly involved with people who attempted to deny the rights of the House, who in many cases were his own tenants. By his strenuous efforts he succeeded in winning the majority of these contests, in some of which he embarked upon courses of action which to modern sentiment appear indefensible. In 1428 he was involved in a tiresome dispute with one of his rectors. He lost the case at canon law, but, by the advice of a friend, carried it to the common law tribunals, where he won it. There is more than a suspicion that the chief justice, Sir William Babyngton, was bribed to decide in favour of the Abbey.[1] Nor was this the only instance of such conduct: the list of extraordinary expenses incurred during the first period of Wheathamstede's reign opens with an account of a large number of gifts of plate to those in high official positions —gifts which were not likely to have been bestowed without ulterior motive.[2] The friend whose counsel the Abbot followed on this particular occasion was his old college ally, Thomas Bekyntone, Dean of the Court of Arches, and sometime secretary to Henry VI. Bekyntone was almost as good a friend to the Abbey as was Duke Humphrey of Gloucester; for it must be assigned to the credit of the Abbot's intelligence, if not to that of his honesty, that he devised a most ingenious method of defrauding the Exchequer with the help of these his two powerful friends. His predecessors had been content to purchase royal licence to avoid the operation of the Mortmain statute: John was too clever to spend money thus. He suffered the escheator to seize lands legally forfeit through the statute, and then, by the joint influence of his two friends with the King, would beg the land back again as a free gift from the Crown. In this way John obtained possessions in more than twelve different places; including, among other acquisi-

[1] In the list of Extraordinary Expenses," Registrum Johannis Amundesham," ii. 256, occurs the following item: " 100 shillings. Paid for a certain silver gilt cup given to William Babyngtone, knight and chief justice of the King's Bench, for favours done to the Abbey."

[2] " Registrum Johannis Whethamstede," ii. 222, 256.

tions, the cell of Pembroke, the gift of Humphrey, which carried with it the patronage of four rectories and four vicarages.[1] So much, indeed, of the success of Abbot John was due to the friendship of the Duke, that the resignation of the Abbot in 1440 is generally considered to have taken place because of the waning power of the "Good Humphrey".

Wheathamstede's care was not confined to the management of his old estates and the acquisition of new ones; he undertook important reforms in the internal economy of the House. In 1431 he instituted a common chest, with a revenue of its own, to which recourse could be had in time of need;[2] and in the same year he appointed for the first time a permanent Master of Works. This official was entrusted with the duty of supervising the fabric, and of paying, out of his endowments, many of the fixed charges connected with building operations and with the entertainment of the convent, which had hitherto fallen to the lot of the Abbot.[3] The obedientiaries were at the same time relieved of some of their burdens, especially of the uncertain and unreckonable "expensæ circa reparationes," which played in the internal economy of the House the same distracting part as, in the external sphere, had the heavy occasional dues to Pope and King before the reforms of De la Mare.[4]

On more than one occasion, John had to fight hard to maintain inviolate his precious privileges. The episcopal attacks upon the right of exemption became more and more formidable as the century drew on. When he was in Italy in 1423 the Abbot had a hot altercation with the Bishop of Lincoln over the whole question of exemption from episcopal authority. The animus displayed by the Bishop so alarmed John that he made a special journey to Rome to gain the ear of the Pope. As usual, the Papal policy was rather to weaken

[1] "Registrum Johannis Amundesham," ii. 185.

[2] "C.P.L.," 1431 (327).

[3] Cf. Brit. Mus. "Arundel MS." 34, fol. 64*b*. "Registrum Johannis Amundesham," ii. 292.

[4] Cf. "Cotton MS. Claudius E." iv. ff. 346, 347*a*. "Registrum Johannis Amundesham," i. 307-11.

than to strengthen the episcopate, and the Abbot received a welcome assurance of protection at the Curia. In 1425, again, the same dispute broke out afresh, this time with the Primate, Henry Chichele, who would not allow himself to be convinced that the Abbey was exempt from his jurisdiction until he was shown a letter of his predecessor Reynolds, dated 1318, admitting that the Abbey was subject only to the authority of Rome. The most formidable struggle of all, however, broke out in 1433, and arose, like so many of the most dangerous contests, out of a struggle thoughtlessly entered upon by one of the Priors of the dependent houses. A purely personal quarrel between a tactless Prior of Binham and a jealous Bishop of Norwich over the question of the former's exemption from the duty of collecting the clerical tenth, suddenly broadened out into a pitched battle between the supporters and the impugners of the privilege of exemption. A trial took place at Blackfriars in the presence of the Treasurer and barons of the Exchequer; and such was the unpopularity of the exempted houses that while the Abbot had only his legal advisers, the Bishop was supported by both Archbishops, and by all the notable prelates of the province of Canterbury. The Abbot attempted to prove by the foundation charter of Offa that no bishop could or ought to exercise any act of jurisdiction within the liberty of St. Alban. But it is to be noted that while Offa's charter, as preserved in the Cottonian MS., does not, as we saw above, contain a single syllable which can be taken to imply an exemption so tremendous, yet the version presented by the Abbot[1] is full of matter interpolated since the time of Paris, designed, apparently, to meet just such a contingency. The Abbot's forgery, if his it were, was crowned with success; for though the termination of the case cannot be discovered, the St. Albans writer who narrates it adopts a tone of glee which can only mean that the Bishops sustained another defeat. Once more the ecclesiastical privileges of the House had been maintained inviolate. At about the same time its temporal privileges sustained an important increase.

[1] "Registrum Johannis Amundesham," i. 344.

In December, 1425, there had been a great Inspeximus and confirmation of all the Abbey charters, from the time of Offa to that of Richard II.[1] This was not wholly satisfactory. The vague general terms in which so many of the charters were couched, though well adapted to cover advancing claims under the cloak of prescription, were very ill suited to protect claims already established from the ingenuity of fifteenth-century chicanery. In the time of Henry IV letters of interpretation had been obtained, but the limiting effects of these was so great that they did the Abbey more harm than good. In the year 1440, therefore, in answer to the Abbot's complaints that the royal justices too frequently deprived St. Alban of his rights, Henry VI granted a magnificent privilegium. Stating that the Abbey had been hindered from enjoying its full liberties as well by the vague wording of ancient charters as by the limiting effect of the letters of interpretation rashly obtained by former abbots, the King granted in fullest terms the return of writs, the goods of outlaws and felons—even when royal tenants: all fines for trespass, all amercements: all treasure-trove: all the King's rights arising from murder, rape, and escape of felons.[2] Moreover, a further privilege was granted to the House. Hitherto, the Abbot had taken the profits of the assizes held by the justices of the King; but henceforth the liberty was to hold its own assizes by its own officials, to whom the Abbot alone had the right of issuing commissions. No royal justices were to venture within the liberty without the express leave of the Abbot.[3] The effect of this privilege was to make the liberty an *imperium in imperio* such as it had never been before. It is significant that the grant was made by the weakest King who had ruled the country since Saxon times.

During the first half of the fifteenth century the literary reputation of the House appears on the whole to have been maintained. It is true that our chief sources for the period, the fragmentary compilations known as the Registers of

[1] "C.P.R.," 1425 (323). [2] *Ibid.* 1440 (422).
[3] "Registrum Johannis Whethamstede," ii. 126.

Amundesham and Wheathamstede, if indeed they are not of slightly later date, bear all the marks of being private compilations by individual monks rather than the official annals of the St. Albans scriptorium. Nor is it without significance that when the House desired a translation into English of the "Vita S. Albani," they preferred to entrust the task to the renowned John Lydgate, then a monk at Bury, rather than to employ any of their own brethren. But Abbot John himself bore a literary reputation that more than compensated for any falling-off in the work turned out by the scriptorium. He was much admired as a model of epistolary style, and was from time to time requested to draw up letters to the Pope in which elegance was deemed essential. His style presents no possible attraction to modern taste: it is florid, obscure, and so weighted with recondite classical allusions as to be at times incomprehensible. Instead of being a first-rate source for the social history of the time, Wheathamstede's many letters have survived only to tantalize the modern investigator, who finds it impossible to extract from their bombastic phraseology any information of value. John also essayed composition in verse, with most deplorable results. It is difficult to realize, from his writings, that he lived in the age of Poggio and Nicoli, that his journeys to Italy must have brought him into contact with the seat of the Revival of learning. It may be, indeed, that in his Italian experiences lies the secret of John's failure. Brought into touch with a spirit which he could not understand, but of which he admired the results, he was led to sacrifice everything to a striving after impressive effect. It is mainly in his more ephemeral productions, however, that this tendency is so strongly marked. In his principal works, "The Granarium" and "The Palearium" (which still await an editor), he remains a typical divine of the middle ages, taking all knowledge to be his province. The defects in his work, patent as they are to modern eyes, did not detract one whit from his great reputation. But the Abbot was not merely a man of letters, an arbiter of literary taste, he was in addition a generous friend to learning. He presented to the library eighty-

seven books, of which the names of thirty-one only are preserved.[1] The list, typically mediæval, includes a Cato with glosses, a Boethius with glosses, a Valerius Maximus, together with many works on controversial theology. The total cost of this valuable addition to the library of the House exceeded £100.[2] And as might have been expected from his once having held the position of Prior, he was particularly generous to the inmates of the St. Albans' studium at Oxford. He increased their stipends, he built them a library and a small chapel, and he paid for a wall which enclosed the precincts of the College.[3] Moreover, as President of the Benedictine Order, he assisted the University in building the new Divinity Schools.[4] In a word, he was the most prominent figure in the literary and educational circles of his day.

Towards the end of 1440, just after obtaining his magnificent grant from Henry VI, the Abbot resigned on a liberal allowance. His excuse was what would now be called nervous breakdown: but it is highly probable that the resignation was due, in part at any rate, to the waning power of Humphrey. On 28 November a *congé d'élire* was obtained, and on some day at the beginning of December, apparently, John Stoke, Prior of Wallingford, was elected. Very little is known about Abbot Stoke, who possessed none of the graces of his predecessor, and has in consequence fared rather hardly at the hands of historians, ancient and modern. He was at any rate a strong and active administrator. He had to defend the property of the House against persons so powerful as the Earl of Oxford; and on the whole, he ruled with some success. But he was close-fisted in the matter of money. As Prior of Wallingford, his extortionate conduct towards the vicars of churches impropriated to his cell had drawn upon him the unfavourable notice of Wheathamstede, who had warned him to allow them a competent sustenance.[5] Soon after his eleva-

[1] Brit. Mus. "Arundel MS.," 34, f. 66*a*.
[2] "Registrum Johannis Amundesham," ii. 268-70.
[3] *Ibid.* 256.
[4] "Epistolæ Academicæ O.H.S.," i. 52, 62.
[5] "Registrum Johannis Whethamstede," ii. 441.

tion, he got into fresh trouble. Probably his position was none of the easiest. There must have been a marked tendency to contrast him unfavourably with his popular and famous predecessor, with whom, indeed, he soon became embroiled. John Wheathamstede accepted a Papal provision,[1] and Stoke, who did not see why under the circumstances the House should continue to provide the pension as previously arranged, attempted to stop the payment. Humphrey of Gloucester was called in as mediator, with the natural result that the award was entirely in favour of the Abbot's opponent. John Stoke's indignation being once aroused, he shortly showed himself a good hater, and Wheathamstede's old adversary, the Bishop of Norwich, now Bishop of Lincoln, is mentioned as interfering to protect Wheathamstede from the malice of his successor. That Abbot John Stoke was a man of ability is undeniable: he was employed by the Government in a diplomatic mission to the Emperor in 1442,[2] and we have seen him to be an astute defender of the liberties of the House; but he was certainly tactless and probably harsh. In the course of the year 1449 he got into serious trouble with the cells of Belvoir and Wymondham. The prior of the former House was driven to appeal to Rome in order to anticipate his deposition on frivolous pretexts and his recall to St. Albans.[3] In the case of Wymondham, the quarrel became acute. The only available source of information is so biased against Stoke that it is difficult to arrive at the rights of the case. All that can be said for certain is, that the Abbot was for some reason dissatisfied with the conduct of Prior Stephen London—his own nominee—and attempted to recall him: that the local gentry, including, of course, the patron, interfered: and that as a result of their representations to the Crown and to the Curia, the cell was wholly withdrawn from the jurisdiction of St. Albans, and converted into an independent House.[4] Nor was Abbot John's trouble confined to

[1] Cf. "C.P.R.," 1446 (408). [2] "Rymer," xi. 10. [3] "C.P.R.," 1449 (247).
[4] *Ibid.* (260). Whether the separation was justified or not, it is impossible to say. It is only certain that when the connection between Abbey and cell

the cells. During his rule no fewer than nine brethren left the convent[1] and four obtained Papal permission to betake themselves to the revolted House of Wymondham.[2] John's reign, in fact, was a turbulent and unsatisfactory time. The only event of real importance, from the point of view of the monks, was the internment of Duke Humphrey in the tomb prepared for him on the verge of the Saints' Chapel in the Abbey Church. Even if it be impossible to commend the methods by which Abbot Stoke got his money, there can be no question that when he spent it, he spent it magnificently. The tomb of Humphrey, which is in truth a small chantry chapel, exquisitely designed, cost more than £430,[1] and was constructed at the charges of the Abbot.

After the death of Humphrey, Abbot John took the opportunity of driving a hard bargain with the Crown. The late Duke had presented Abbot Wheathamstede with some jewels for the use of the House: and these jewels Henry VI desired to secure for his college at Eton. John gave up his claim on them, but only on condition that the liberties of the House were confirmed: that even the King's own household officers were to be excluded from the liberty without the special leave of the Abbot: and finally, that the House should pay only £20 in every clerical tenth, and £10 in every half-tenth, until the full value of the jewels, £600, had been made up. Verily John knew how to drive a hard bargain for the benefit of the House. It might have been thought that this characteristic would have helped to secure his popularity with the convent. Such was far from being the case. His austere and unamiable disposition, coupled with his curious neglect to sustain the patronage of education which had distinguished his predecessor, more than outweighed in the estimation of

had once been severed, Wymondham fell into a very bad condition. The visitations of Bishop Nicke of Norwich reveal some startling abuses in the life of the inmates. Cf. C. G. Coulton. "Mediæval Studies," i. 4.

[1] "Registrum Johannis Whethamstede," i. 137-46.

[2] "*Ibid.* ii. 61.

[3] "Dugdale," ii. 202, note *f*.

the convent any advantages which he was able to confer upon them.

During his time the change in the economy of the Abbey's estates went on apace. John apparently earned some censure by the frequency by which he manumitted his bondmen, but it is doubtful whether he had any choice in the matter. Like his brother-abbots in France, he found it necessary to go with the time.[1] It was no longer profitable to cultivate demesne farms with the labour that could be wrung from unwilling serfs. The policy of the Abbey for some years had been to reduce its property to a rent charge. The demesne, the impropriated churches, the very tithes themselves, had, as we have noticed, all been farmed out in varying degrees of thoroughness. John merely seems to have followed the lines laid down by his predecessors in the matter of impropriations and of manumissions; and the accusation that he was stimulated by greed for the fees offered him by the bondmen is only another proof of the dislike in which he was held by the convent.[2]

John Stoke died 14 December, 1451. Two candidates were put forward to succeed him; each for the present refused to stand, and each ultimately became Abbot. The first was the Prior, William Albon; the second was the Archdeacon, William Wallingford, of whom much has to be said within the next few years. But the convent would have none to rule over them but their former Abbot, John Wheathamstede, now an old but still hale and vigorous man. He was re-elected on 16 January, 1452; and a week later his temporalities were restored.[3] He found the convent still grumbling greatly over the late Abbot's neglect of culture and learning. They complained that the instruction available for the younger brethren was extremely defective: that the number of students from St. Albans at Oxford had fallen off: and that, in consequence, it was difficult to find people able and willing to undertake

[1] Cf. Lavisse, "Hist. de France," iv. 2, 128.
[2] "Registrum Johannis Whethamstede," i. 105-7.
[3] "C.P.R.," 1452 (542)

the duty of preaching.[1] The Abbot set about remedying these defects with his usual energy, and, it must be presumed, with success. But in fairness to Abbot Stoke, it must be borne in mind that the paucity of students at Oxford may not have been wholly due to his fault. The dissensions which had appeared from time to time between the University and the regular orders were now assuming formidable dimensions. Moreover, in the fifteenth century, Oxford had been gradually growing out of favour with the orthodox, owing to its connection with Wicliffite heresy.[2] It is possible that this explains the neglect of Stoke to maintain the due number of St. Albans students at Gloucester College.

It was probably fortunate for the House that the old and experienced Wheathamstede was at the head of affairs: for the country was in a disturbed condition, and it seemed likely that civil war would break out ere long. In such a contingency, St. Albans was not likely to be more fortunate than formerly in avoiding the dangers to which its situation exposed it. The Abbot therefore diligently set himself to gain the favour of persons whom he imagined would be able to assist the House in time of need. Wherein he was but following the excellent advice given to John Paston by an anonymous friend: "Spende somewhat of your goodes now and get yow lordship 'Quia ibi pendet tota lex et prophetae'".[3] It is this policy, consistently pursued, that has aroused the indignation of modern historians and led them to bring the charges of "obsequiousness" and "abject submission to those in authority" against the Abbey in the later fifteenth century.[4] But it is very hard to see what other course of action could have been adopted. The House could no longer rely for protection upon superstitious fear of the vengeance which St. Alban would exact from those who molested him. If the community were not to be despoiled of all it possessed it

[1] "Registrum Johannis Whethamstede," i. 24.
[2] Rashdall, "Universities of Europe," ii. 553.
[3] "Paston Letters," ed. Gairdner, i. 156.
[4] "Registrum Johannis Whethamstede," ii. xxiv., xxv.

must secure friends at court who would interfere on its behalf when necessary. That which the Abbot feared particularly, was a resumption of the grants made to the House through the good offices of Duke Humphrey. In 1457 and again in 1461, Wheathamstede was compelled to use the greatest diligence in order to secure the exemption of St. Albans from statutes resuming Crown grants.[1] It is probable that until the outbreak of open hostilities between York and Lancaster, the feeling of the convent was divided. While the reigning King was a notable patron of the Abbey, and had shown it many marks of favour; yet, on the other hand, the aspersions cast by the Lancastrians upon the memory of Humphrey, with whose reputation the good fame of the House was in some sense involved, touched the brethren very nearly. And whatever the private sympathies of Abbot and convent may have been,[2] the fact remains that the House did not venture to take a side. By its very position, it was compelled to hold aloof from politics as much as might be, in order to avoid the destruction which involves the peaceful in times of violence. Its neutrality is, in fact, sufficiently shown by the danger to which it was exposed in 1455 of being sacked by the Yorkists, while in 1461 it was actually sacked by the Lancastrians.

During the years 1455-61, for the first time since the death of Walsingham, the work of St. Albans writers becomes of first-rate value for the concerns of the kingdom at large. This is due to the accident which decided that the two most momentous battles of the war should take place within sight of the Abbey walls. In May, 1455, the royal forces occupied the town, shutting off from London Richard of York and his army. After some parley, described in detail in the Register, the terms proffered by the Yorkists were rejected, and Richard's men advanced to the attack between 11 a.m. and noon of 22 May. The narrow streets and steep alleys swarmed with struggling men: shafts fell thick in Holywell and St. Peter's

[1] "Registrum Johannis Whethamstede," i. 265, 417.

[2] Hallam thinks them Lancastrian. Riley, with greater probability, considers them Yorkist.

Streets: the kennels beside the roadway ran blood. At length the Lancastrians, cleft by Warwick's dash through their centre, were hurled from the town, which suffered a terrible sack at the hands of the victors. The Abbey itself only escaped the general disaster owing to a fortunate accident. The King had left it before the outbreak of hostilities. The bodies of the Lancastrian leaders were left lying where they had fallen, but at the prayer of the Abbot, permission was given to inter the Duke of Somerset, the Earl of Northumberland, and Lord Clifford in the Lady Chapel. Three years later, when a show of peace was patched up between the parties, the Abbey received an annual payment for the celebration of Masses for the dead.

The danger being over for the moment, life at the Abbey resumed its even course. It is curious to find that in the very year of the conflict there was a recurrence of the old dispute concerning the Abbot's rights of multure. A newcomer, John Chertsey, ignorant of the susceptibilities of the Abbey, set up a horse-mill in Watford. When the inevitable seizure of the stones took place at the hands of the Abbot's bailiff, an amusing incident occurred. While the stones were lying in the constable's house, Mistress Chertsey gathered a band of supporters of her own sex, and recaptured them—"sed non absque probrosis conviciis verborum"—as may well be imagined.[1] The Abbot's dignity was offended, and poor Chertsey had to make abject apology for his valiant wife. Nor was this the only victory of the Abbot in the critical year 1455: over a disputed manor he came into conflict with a redoubtable person named Thomas Charleton, who had proved altogether too much for Abbot Stoke, but was now utterly vanquished by the superior address of Wheathamstede after a short but sharp struggle.

Abbot John spent much time and trouble upon beautifying the fabric of the House. In consequence, doubtless of the parsimony of Stoke, there seems to have been no shortage of money during the years 1450-60. Immediately after re-election, Wheathamstede started to build the library so long

[1] "Registrum Johannis Whethamstede," i. 199, 202.

projected, for which he had made some preparations during his first abbacy. In his second year he completed the building after spending £150 on the fabric alone.[1] Much more had to be expended upon it before it was ready for the reception of the books; the lecterns had to be constructed, the shelves fitted, and the twelve windows provided each with stained glass illustrating the subject-matter of the books beneath.[2] He then rebuilt the bakehouse, which had fallen into complete disrepair, and on this he spent £205. He also constructed his own tomb, at a cost of £20; he provided a silver gilt retable, weighing 513 ounces, and costing £146 for workmanship; and he presented the church with a new pair of organs.[3] In this, as well as in his other business, his right-hand man was the capable archdeacon, William Wallingford, whose abilities obviously marked him out for high office.

This time of peace was not to last long. In February, 1461, the Abbey found itself, to its vast discomfort, involved once more in the main current of English politics. This time the position of the parties was reversed. The Queen and the Prince of Wales, elated by the decisive victory of their party at Wakefield on 30 December, 1460, marched upon London. Warwick, with all the troops he could collect, lay across their path at St. Albans. He was decisively defeated on 17 February, and the town once more sustained the horrors of a sack. The rude northern troops of Margaret were less amenable to discipline than had been the Yorkist troops six years before, and this time the Abbey, with the neighbouring cells of Sopwell and St. Mary des Prez,[4] shared in the general disaster. All that could be conveniently carried off fell a prey to the spoilers, who violated the sanctity of the church itself in their quest for plunder. Even the Queen herself, it was bitterly remarked, went off with the best jewel.[5] Much more

[1] "Registrum Johannis Whethamstede," i. 423.
[2] "Dugdale," ii. 247-8. J. W. Clark, "Care of Books," 171, 241.
[3] "Registrum Johannis Whethamstede," i. 424.
[4] *Ibid.* ii. 88.
[5] *Ibid.* i. 399.

serious from the point of view of the convent was the wanton destruction of the stores of the Abbey, and the ravaging of the surrounding districts. The scarcity of provisions was so great that the convent was compelled to disperse for a short time. The continuity of life at St. Albans was broken for the first time since the foundation of the House, but was resumed, it seems, soon after the battle of Towton a month later. By November, 1462, all was going on as usual. There was a great Inspeximus and confirmation of charters by Edward IV, in the course of which the privilege of 1440 was re-stated in clearer terms and rendered more effectual.[1] And yet it is not perhaps over-fanciful to imagine that this catastrophe produced a profound effect upon the House. Indeed, it seems that the whole policy of the House during the next twenty-five years was coloured by a vivid recollection of those terrible days when the peace of the Abbey was violated, and its sanctuary befouled.

Abbot Wheathamstede died a very old man on 20 January, 1465. He was succeeded by William Albon, whose election took place on 25 February. Albon had been prior, and almost his first act was to elevate the capable archdeacon, William Wallingford, to the position left vacant by his own promotion.[2] Of the rule of Albon little is known, but it appears from his Register that he was a man of poor health, perhaps with little strength of character. The times were exceedingly difficult; Edward IV was on the throne, but with Queen Margaret in France jealously waiting for revenge, and with Warwick in England, growing more and more restive under the King's rule, none knew how long he would remain there. It is thus hardly surprising to find that the Abbot made it his business to purchase, with gifts of advowsons—his only marketable commodity—the favour of anyone possessing political power.[3] The office of seneschal of the House was from time to time conferred upon persons who were considered likely to be able to protect the inmates, frequently

[1] Clutterbuck, "Hist. of Herts," App. i. [2] "C.P.R.," 1465 (345).
[3] "Registrum Johannis Whethamstede," ii. 97, 183, 196, 224, 265, etc.

without much regard to the rights of those who had received a previous grant. Such conduct may not seem estimable, but it is surely excusable considering the circumstances amidst which the Abbey found itself, and considering also the terrible experience through which it had passed in 1461.

During the time of Albon, much care was taken to preserve the discipline both of the House and of its cells. Any complaint or disturbance was sufficient cause for a visitation, and the changes which followed in these cases showed that such a visitation was no formality.[1] On two occasions, at any rate, St. Albans itself was visited by the emissaries of the General Chapters at Northampton. On 25 June, 1465, came the Abbot of Peterborough to hold a formal visitation;[2] and on 21 April, 1468, the Abbot of Evesham fulfilled the same duty.[3] In 1473 Abbot Albon himself was appointed visitor of Glastonbury—a fact which may be taken as evidence that the state of St. Albans was considered satisfactory. The chief defect in the Abbey during the time of Albon was not slackness of discipline, but the presence of dissension among the brethren. It is to this period, apparently, that the scandalous compilation known as the "Register of Abbot John Wheathamstede" must be assigned. This is clearly an attempt to destroy the reputation and blast the career of the energetic archdeacon and prior, William Wallingford, who was the obvious candidate for the next vacancy of the abbacy. In this compilation, William is accused over and over again of lying, of perjury, of malversation of public money. His nefariousness and subtlety are enlarged upon, his pride and pomposity exposed to ridicule. In addition, elaborate efforts are made to involve him in the charge of stealing large sums from the savings of Stoke.[4] It is asserted that though the Abbot in question had been parsimonious, and had lived in a time of great prosperity, that at his death only 250 marks could be found in the treasury. An elaborate story of Abbot Stoke's death-bed scene was designed to make it appear that he had

[1] "Registrum Johannis Whethamstede," ii., 13, 28, 30, 186-7, 213-15, 240.
[2] *Ibid.* 47. [3] *Ibid.* 77. [4] *Ibid.* i. 105.

entrusted the archdeacon with no less than 1000 marks. In consequence of the refusal of William to disgorge his gains, so the tale runs, the time of Wheathamstede's second abbacy had opened with a period of great distress and scarcity. The Abbot was only persuaded not to dismiss the peculator, it is said, by William's offer to defray the debts of the House from his private purse, and by the intercession of the powerful protectors whose favour he had gained by ignoble means.

It would scarcely be necessary to point out the absurdity of these charges, which have been largely refuted in the mere course of the present history, were it not for the fact that Dr. Gairdner made so much of them in his last book.[1] In the first place, the money which Stoke left was expended, at his own request, upon a great bell called "John" in memory of him, and upon the re-glazing of the cloister;[2] and when this had been done, there was still sufficient money left to make the first years of Wheathamstede's second abbacy, as we have seen, a time of elaborate and expensive building operations. Nor was Wheathamstede the man to employ in responsible positions an official guilty of the gross breaches of trust which are laid to the door of Wallingford. It was not merely that William retained his office: he remained, as we saw, the right-hand man of the Abbot until the day when John died. But in fact the charges as they stand are utterly preposterous; and it is safe to say that they would have been treated with the contempt they deserve but for the evidence afforded by the monition of Cardinal Morton to Wallingford when Abbot. More will be said of this later.

Abbot Albon appears to have been a prudent steward of the goods of his House. In the St. Albans obit book he is said to have purchased lands and tenements bringing in an additional revenue of 100 marks annually. The manumission of bondmen, as appears from his Register, went on apace during his time; and it seems that the Abbey was fairly prosperous, for in addition to presenting books, vestments,

[1] "Lollardy and the Reformation," vol. iii. p. xxxi *seq.*

[2] "Registrum Johannis Whethamstede," i. 470.

and ornaments to the value of 600 marks, he built stone apartments for the accommodation of the bursar and the cellarer.[1] But there is little to be found about Albon, and less about the state of the House under his rule. At the time of his death, 1 July, 1476, the condition of the Abbey is wholly unknown to us.

On 10 July a *congé d'élire* was obtained,[2] and on 5 August a General Chapter of St. Albans, consisting of fifty-two monks of the House, and eight priors of the cells, was summoned to elect a superior. The usual method of election by compromise was abandoned, probably because there was one candidate who seemed marked out for the office. William Wallingford, ten years prior, was elected abbot *per viam Sancti Spiritus.* On 9 August his temporalities were restored,[3] and three days later his installation feast was celebrated with great magnificence.

[1] "Registrum Johannis Whethamstede," i. 477.
[2] "C.P.R.," 1465 (386).
[3] *Ibid.* 1476 (597).

CHAPTER XI.

THE LAST DAYS OF THE ABBEY.

It is plain that the accusations put forward against Wallingford during his priorate had found no credence with the bulk of the convent. For, as Cardinal Gasquet has shown,[1] a comparison of the three lists of the community given in the Register proves that between 1452 and 1476 some twenty-four brothers had died—that is, there would have been at least thirty people present at Wallingford's election who would be in a position to know the truth of the charges brought against his conduct during Wheathamstede's second abbacy. And it is hardly probable that sufficient pressure could have been put on sixty monks, eight of whom had, as priors of cells, an independent position of their own, to cause them to choose unanimously a man as undesirable as Wallingford's accusers would make him out to be. Granted, however, that in 1476 Abbot William enjoyed a reputation not only for ability but also for integrity, what is there to be discovered about the character of his rule? Over the state of St. Albans' discipline during the next sixteen years more controversy has raged than over all the remaining seven centuries of the history of the House. On the one hand, Froude asserted that the Abbot was a monster of wickedness, presiding over a den of infamy: on the other side, Cardinal Gasquet would make Wallingford a slandered saint, the victim of Morton's political scheming and jealous spite. Dr. Gairdner professes to hold the balance between them, but is in reality strongly disposed to adopt Froude's view. No one of these conflicting theories entirely satisfies the available facts.

The first thing to be noticed in the Register of Wallingford is the continuance of the sense of political insecurity that

[1] "Abbot Wallingford," p. 28.

marked the reigns of Wheathamstede and Albon. The authorities of the Abbey seem still to be haunted by a recollection of the catastrophe of 1461, and to strain every nerve to avoid a repetition of the disaster. To this must be ascribed the transference of the office of seneschal from magnate to magnate in an attempt to secure protection for the House from the party momentarily in power. In 1474, for example, it was given to Forster for life: but in 1479 it was transferred to Lord Hastings. Three years later the two men hold it jointly. Finally, when Hastings was executed and Forster thrown into the Tower by Richard III the office was given to the all-powerful Catesby.[1] It is the general feeling of insecurity, moreover, that explains the extraordinary extension of the traffic in patronage with a view to gaining the favour of the great. Edward IV, Queen Elizabeth, Lionel her son, George of Clarence, Richard of Gloucester, and many others of less note, were propitiated with gifts of "next presentations" to valuable livings. The result of this process upon the character of the incumbents was naturally deplorable. Throughout the Diocese of St. Albans there seems to have been a continual shifting of vicars, as now this man, now that, resigned his position in the hope of obtaining a more lucrative cure. The vicarage of Abbot's Langley fell vacant by resignation six times in nineteen years: at Elstree there were nine rectors in sixteen years: and at Shephall five in six years.[2] In addition, there occur in the Register grave charges of murder, treason, and apostasy against both the regular and the secular clergy.[3]

While it appears clear that the condition of the clergy in the Archdeaconry was not above reproach, it is not so easy to form any idea of the state of the House itself. At first sight, everything seems to go on as usual. The General Chapters of Northampton send their visitors:[4] while on one occasion during his reign, namely, May, 1480,[5] Abbot Wallingford was himself appointed visitor of the Houses in the Diocese of

[1] "Registrum Johannis Whethamstede," ii. 113, 199, 200.
[2] *Ibid.* xxxii.
[3] *Ibid.* 11, 12, 273, etc.
[4] *Ibid.* 228-9.
[5] *Ibid.* 219.

Lincoln. There was, moreover, great activity in the matter of visiting the cells of the House, the Abbot granting commissions to proxies when he was unable to perform the duty himself. In 1477 the cells of Hertford and Hatfield were inspected,[1] and a Commission was given to William Hardewyk to visit St. Mary des Prez. In the next year the same man was appointed to visit Pembroke;[2] and a Commission was granted for the visitation of Tynemouth, as a result of which the prior of the cell was deprived for disobedience to the visitors.[3] None the less, there is evidence, despite this zeal for order, that the state of the House was unsatisfactory. As in the time of Albon, the trouble arose rather from dissensions among the brethren than from any notable neglect of discipline or decency. An excellent illustration is afforded by the case of William Dyxwell. This man had been Prior of Binham in 1464, but had been deprived for misconduct by Wheathamstede[4] and recalled to St. Albans. When at the Abbey he exerted himself so successfully to gain the favour of the next Abbot, Albon, that he was restored to his cell, and the office of prior conferred upon him for life.[5] While at St. Albans, he had conceived a peculiar aversion for the Archdeacon, Nicholas Boston, a member of the Commission whose report had brought about his recall from Binham. In 1478, when the cell of Tynemouth fell vacant, Boston was made prior, at the request of Richard of Gloucester.[6] Less than a year afterwards, a Commission was appointed to visit the cell, consisting, extraordinary to relate, of the lately degraded Prior of Tynemouth, Langeton, and William Dyxwell. As might have been expected, Boston fared badly; and though, as afterwards appeared, he was innocent of all offence, yet he was deprived with contumely before the charges against him, which owed their existence to the malignity of Dyxwell, had been investigated. Dyxwell secured his own appointment in Boston's place, and, not content with this, caused his enemy to be seized

[1] "Registrum Johannis Whethamstede," ii. 174.
[2] *Ibid.* 178. [3] *Ibid.* 185-6. [4] *Ibid.* 216.
[5] *Ibid.* 111. [6] *Ibid.* 184-5.

and imprisoned.[1] Less than a month afterwards the Abbot suspected that he had been deceived by the astuteness of Dyxwell, and ordered a fresh visitation to inquire into the differences between the present and the former Priors of Tynemouth. This was in December, 1480, and the result of the Commission is unknown. But some time before 1484, Boston was reinstated, and Dyxwell sent back to his old House of Binham.[2] The righting of Boston seems to have been connected with the intervention of Richard III who, as Duke of Gloucester, had secured his appointment to the cell. Not until September, 1485, was there a reconciliation between Boston and Dyxwell, although the latter had declared more than a year previously[3] that his accusations had sprung from malice alone. A case of this kind shows clearly that the administration of the Abbey was at this time neither so strong nor so efficient as it was wont to be.

The events of 1485, which set Henry Tudor on the throne, seem to have left the Abbey unaffected as far as positive disturbance was concerned; but it was probably exceedingly unfortunate for St. Albans that its seneschal at the time was Richard III's minister, Catesby.[4] From the first the new Government, soon to be powerful beyond all bounds, must have been ill-disposed towards an Abbey which had received favours at the hands of Richard himself.[5] The year after the Revolution, Abbot William had to remit his right of hearing a suit against some men of the liberty to the Court of King's Bench.[6] He also apprehended some attack upon his ecclesiastical privileges, for in 1487 he sent his archdeacon, John Rothbury, to Rome, with several requests, the most important being for power to confer orders, and to confirm boys within his liberty.[7] This was plainly an attempt to convert the land of St. Alban into an independent bishopric, subject only to Rome, and wholly independent of the ecclesiastical organization of the rest of the kingdom. Rather naturally, it was

[1] "Registrum Johannis Whethamstede," ii. 223.
[2] *Ibid.* 254. [3] *Ibid.* 254. [4] *Ibid.* 267. [5] "C.P.R.," 1484 (514).
[6] "Registrum Johannis Whethamstede," ii. 277. [7] *Ibid.* 289.

refused by the Curia. The Abbot, however, had not been mistaken in his forecast of the political horizon. Three years later, Cardinal Morton decided to make a supreme effort to break down the immunities of the exempt Houses, which prevented his master and himself from being absolute over the whole realm. His zeal was doubtless spurred by reports that the state of the greater Houses left some room for improvement, but there is little reason to suppose that his main motive was other than political. Whether there was an additional stimulus of jealousy between the all-powerful Minister-Primate, and the Abbot of the premier House in England, it is impossible to say. From what is known of the character of Morton, it seems not unlikely that he would feel with peculiar bitterness the exemption from his authority that St. Albans enjoyed. At all events, whatever his precise motives may have been, there is no question that his action was vigorous. But he had been anticipated by the watchful Abbot. Before the end of 1489 Wallingford had got wind of the Primate's intended visitation, and had dispatched a proctor, John Thornton, to Rome to thwart the efforts of the Archbishop's agents. On 6 February, 1490, a brief was addressed to Morton, warning him of the privileges of St. Alban, and bidding him assist in their preservation.[1] It was probably on account of this that when Morton obtained, on 6 March, 1490, a bull giving full rights of visitation over the exempt Houses of England, he found to his chagrin that the Houses of the Benedictine Order were not included therein. He then decided to employ "bluff," by pretending to assume that the bull empowered him to claim authority both over the Benedictine Houses in general and St. Albans in particular. Relying therefore upon the bull, he dispatched his famous Admonition to Abbot Wallingford.[2]

The contents of this document are well known. They are

[1] "E.H.R.," xxiv. 320, based upon Dr. Gasquet's researches into the Papal archives. Cf. Froude, "Annals of an English Abbey" (Short Studies, iii.). Gairdner, "Lollardy and the Reformation" (iii.). Gasquet, "Abbot Wallingford".

[2] Wilkins, "Concilia," iii. 632.

at the bottom of most of the well-worn arguments brought forward to prove the viciousness of the English Houses prior to the dissolution. In brief, the charges amount to this. The Primate says he has heard that the Abbot has dilapidated the property, has relaxed discipline, has neglected hospitality. If he has not actually encouraged, he has at any rate failed to repress, scandals of the gravest kind connected with his monks and the adjacent nunneries of Sopwell and St. Mary des Prez. In connection with these disorders, the name of one offender, Thomas Sudbury, is specifically mentioned. "The brethren of St. Albans, some of whom, as it is reported, are given over to all the evil things of the world, neglect the service of God. They live publicly and continuously with harlots and mistresses within the precincts of the monastery and without." What foundation these charges possessed beyond the credit lent to vague rumours by an angry man, is not easy to determine. That matters were precisely as Morton suggests is on the face of it incredible. The Abbey was too famous, too near London, too closely related to the thriving town at its doors, for the abuses to have reached the stage indicated by Morton without some fierce outbreak of popular horror which must have left a mark upon the pages of history. On the other hand, the very situation of the Abbey would cause any rumours of irregularity to be buzzed from mouth to mouth, until they became exaggerated beyond recognition. As we have seen, the state of the convent was too disturbed and restless for any such reports to be suppressed. That there was some grave irregularity connected with Thomas Sudbury seems probable from the confidence with which his name is mentioned; and it may well be that the rumours of this single misdemeanour spread abroad, growing as it went, until they came to the ears of Morton himself. That there was any substantial truth in Morton's general charges is tacitly contradicted by the Admonition itself. Not the least remarkable part of the letter is the request that the Abbot, who, if half the charges made against him have any truth, must be a monster of iniquity, will himself correct the faults of which he is accused. Only if

he fails to correct them within thirty days will the Archbishop exercise his powers of visitation and invade the exemption of the House, It certainly looks as though Morton were merely taking advantage of the rumours which had been in circulation about the administration of the House to strengthen his hand for the inevitable appeal to Rome. It is inconceivable that, if matters were really in the state he suggested, he would have forborne to carry out a prompt visitation, giving the Abbot no opportunity to amend the abuses of which he was accused.

The date of this monition was 5 July, 1490. About the same time the Abbot's agents must have been busy at the Curia, for on 11 July they obtained a letter protecting the House in full enjoyment of its privileges until the appeal against the action of the Archbishop had been determined. Morton thus found himself sharply checked, and realized that he must make a supreme effort if he desired to save his dignity. He therefore induced his master, Henry VII, to make a special appeal to the Curia that the visitation might be allowed to proceed. On 30 July, in consequence, a bull was obtained safeguarding the privileges of the House, but allowing, for this occasion solely, special facilities for visitation.[1] The Archbishop was therefore victorious, and could, had he so desired, have exercised over St. Albans full powers as a visitor. Now it has been hotly disputed by Dr. Gairdner and Cardinal Gasquet whether this visitation ever took place. But with all due respect to their authority, the point sinks into insignificance beside the fact that Abbot Wallingford died in peace as Abbot of St. Albans in the summer of 1492.[2] For what it means is this: if the visitation did take place, the Abbot was acquitted; if it did not take place, it could only have been because the Archbishop was now convinced of the worthlessness of the rumours which it had at one time suited him to believe. Modern opinion has therefore no choice but to acquit Wallingford and his House of the charges put forward in Morton's letter—though this is very far from

[1] "E.H.R.," loc. cit. 321. [2] Rot. Parl., 7 Henry VII, membrane 34.

saying, as Cardinal Gasquet is inclined to do, that the state of the House left nothing to be desired at the time.

Apart from the controversy that surrounds his name, Abbot William is principally remarkable for having constructed the beautiful altar screen which is called after him. He also constructed for himself a stately tomb hard by, which is still among the most striking objects in the Abbey church. The construction of these two edifices reveals in William artistic taste of no mean order. And there is some reason for believing that the Abbot was a patron of letters as well as of art. In his time was set up the famous St. Albans printing press, which produced between 1482 and 1486 eight notable works, among them the well-known "Boke of St. Albans". That William had some connection with setting up the press seems probable from the fact that the printer is said to have been a schoolmaster at St. Albans Grammar School, over which the Abbot still retained powers of supervision, and it is natural to suppose that the resources of the House would assist in an enterprise so costly. The Abbot was certainly a friend to learning, whether his influence had anything to do with the St. Albans press or not. In addition to supporting three Abbey scholars at Oxford, he provided funds for training the younger monks; and, moreover, he had been selected by the General Chapter of the order as the most fitting person to select a prior for the Benedictine students at Cambridge.[1] It is pleasant to think that up to the last days of the fifteenth century St. Albans was still distinguished by its zeal for learning.

William Wallingford was succeeded by Prior Thomas Ramridge, who drew up a careful obituary notice to shield the good fame of his predecessor from any aspersions which might be cast upon it by the malice of subsequent ages. Great stress is therein laid upon the ability of the late father, upon his excellent administration, and upon the success which crowned his opposition to Morton.[2] This document, as critical examination shows, embodies at least three earlier documents, drawn up at different times and for different purposes. One

[1] "Registrum Johannis Whethamstede," ii. 59, 60. [2] *Ibid.* 476-9.

of these was put forward, as the date shows, in 1484, and testifies to the worth of the Abbot; the second was composed in 1490, and contains a denial of many of the charges put forward by Morton. Finally, the whole was worked up, supplemented, and recast after the death of the Abbot. Whatever the worth of this may be as evidence of Wallingford's morality, it does at any rate show that he was respected by his convent, who could have had no possible motive in maintaining, after his death, that he was an admirable ruler if in truth the contrary were the case.

The election of Ramridge was confirmed on 16 September, 1492, and of the period which elapsed between that date and his death in 1521 little can be discovered concerning the Abbey. All historical writing had by this time ceased at St. Albans, and only when the Abbot comes into contact with the court circle does he emerge from the obscurity which envelops his doings. There is, however, evidence to show that Ramridge was something of a reformer. Being dissatisfied with the conduct of Robert Newbury, who was keeper of the jail and porter, he dismissed him, thereby exposing himself to an action in Chancery. Nor was this the only case in which the Abbot asserted his authority as against an incompetent official. Finding that Robert Ferrers, the Master of St. Julian's Hospital, had neglected to keep the House in proper repair, he stopped his revenues and attempted to deprive him of his office. Again there was a suit in Chancery, with what result we do not know. Whether the conduct of the Abbot was in all cases as well justified, may perhaps be questioned. His actions would seem to have been sometimes rather high-handed, as when he was accused by John Harpesfield of detaining documents relating to the entail of Harpesfield Manor: and by the Prioress of Sopwell, of altering a lease to the disadvantage of her House. But it is only fair to remember that we have not the Abbot's version of either of these cases.[1]

A curious peace hung over the Abbey during the last forty years of its life, and only just before the final catastrophe does

[1] "Early Chancery Proceedings," "V.C.H.," iv. 409.

the disturbance of its calm bring it once again to the notice of the historian. The Abbot of St. Albans, perhaps owing to narrowing means and rising prices, had definitely sunk to second place among English heads of Houses. Both in 1501, during the festivities which welcomed Princess Catharine of Aragon, and in 1515 during the ceremonial which accompanied the conferring of the Hat upon Wolsey, Abbot Ramridge took second place to his rival of Westminster. In 1517, however, there was a flicker of the old greatness: Ramridge was godfather to the little daughter of the King's sister, the Duchess of Suffolk, while the Queen and the Princess Mary were godmothers.[1]

The explanation of the decline of the Abbey is to be found in economic factors. Abbot Ramridge himself indeed was a careful administrator. By 1506 he had obtained rents and possessions which augmented the annual revenues by £20.[2] In 1515, again, the House received certain valuable donations from Henry VIII for a consideration of 3000 marks. But the Abbot was growing old, and the task of managing the finances became more and more difficult. The House had been in debt to Henry VII; and despite the fact that the Prior of Rochester, who had been appointed coadjutor to the old Abbot, had expended money liberally in endeavouring to restore order to the finances,[3] the debt in 1519 amounted to 4000 marks. The explanation of the bankruptcy which darkened the last days of the Abbey, and which hastened its decline, must be sought in a consideration of the financial state of the House during the years 1500-30. Unfortunately for the inquirer, the returns for Hertfordshire are missing from Henry VIII's great Domesday, the "Valor Ecclesiasticus," and almost the only evidence available as to the economic condition of St. Albans in the sixteenth century comes from the digest of returns known as the "Liber Valorum,"[4] which is at once so compressed and so enigmatic in its statements that it raises far more questions than it answers.

[1] "C.L.P.," 17 July, 1517.
[2] "Registrum Johannis Amundesham," ii. 251.
[3] "C.L.P.," 28 Oct., 1519. *Ibid.* 15 Aug., 1521.
[4] "Dugdale," ii. 250-5.

The first thing to be gathered from it is the sources whence the income of the Abbey was derived. In the old days, as we saw, it came for the most part from the services and dues of the tenants on the estates, of whom not the least profitable were the bondmen. But in the course of the fifteenth century, as we saw, a change had been going on. The manumission of bondmen, the "tenentes ad voluntatem Domini," had been proceeding with increasing speed during the second abbacy of Wheathamstede, and from the time of his death until the end of the reign of Wallingford. At the time of the Dissolution, the importance of these tenants had so far diminished that they brought into the Abbey treasury less than £2 out of a total revenue of more than £2100. The customary tenants, the descendants of the villeins, on the other hand, produced about £480 as against the £110 of the free tenants. The burgesses of St. Albans appear by this time to have shaken off the yoke of the Abbey. The offices of Bailiff and Clerk of the Market were farmed out by the House, doubtless to the townsmen themselves. It is impossible to say with certainty when the enfranchisement took place: but it is reasonable to suppose that the weakness of the House in the latter part of the fifteenth century gave the burgesses their opportunity. In fact, in the sixteenth century, the profits derived from tenants of any class did not figure very largely in the economy of the House. By far the largest proportion of the revenue came from money rents of various kinds. The manors and tenements farmed out brought in about £700, fully one-third of the total income from all sources. Almost, though not quite, as important were the farms of tithes and of rectories, which brought in together about £550. The rent of various mills amounted to £80 in round numbers, while the profits of the manorial courts were under £20. So much for the receipts. We must now glance for a moment at the expenditure. There has fortunately been preserved among the miscellaneous records of the Augmentation Office a MS. volume [1] which gives us the budget of the Abbey for the year 1530. The first thing to be

[1] "Aug. Off. Misc.," Bk. cclxxiv. See "V.C.H. Herts.," iv. 414.

noticed is the fact that the obedientiaries are now deprived of their separate revenues. It would even seem that the departments themselves have lost all importance. Instead of the old plan of communal expenditure, the brethren now received fixed stipends, ranging from £40 in the case of the prior, and £8 13s. 4d. in that of the senior monks, to £6 13s. 4d. in the case of the juniors. From that allowance the members of the convent were apparently expected to pay their "battels," as in an Oxford College. The sum total of the stipends was £416 13s. 4d. The House maintained thirty-five servants, including a clerk of the kitchen and three assistants, two butlers, two brewers, two infirmary attendants, and so on. The wages paid to these amounted to £75 10s. 4d. There were, in addition, a number of more important officers, the Chief Steward, the Abbot's Secretary, the Organist, whose wages came to very nearly the same amount. In annuities, the House paid the substantial sum of £138 19s. 4d. Annual repairs to the fabric cost £105 2s. 3d.: and sundries, such as shoeing horses, cutting wood, haymaking, cleansing the ditch, and so forth, ran to over £150. The total working expenditure for the year was £1203 0s. 5½d., roughly 60 per cent of the entire annual income.

Such is the digested information that can be obtained from the sources at our disposal; and while it is obviously insufficient for the construction of a detailed picture such as that drawn by M. Savine from the fuller evidence of the "Valor Ecclesiasticus,"[1] yet certain conclusions can be deduced therefrom. In the first place, the policy which we noticed to be characteristic of the last century—that of letting out the various possessions of the Abbey for a money rent—has been pursued to the uttermost degree. As far as can be seen, no land was retained in the hands of the House, which, like a modern corporation, derived its income from its capital. At first sight,

[1] Savine, "English Monasteries on the Eve of the Dissolution". From the Appendix to this work it appears that there were three monasteries with larger incomes than St. Albans: Glastonbury, £3311; Christ Church, Canterbury, £2423; Westminster, £2409.

the change would appear to have been exceedingly beneficial. The working expenses would be small. In place of the manifold bailiffs and reeves necessitated by the old manorial system, a small band of rent collectors would suffice to bring the entire revenue into the hands of the recipients. But the £2100 of income did not represent the same purchasing power as the £1050 of the time of Abbot Thomas, far less the £850 of the "Taxatio Ecclesiastica". The Abbey was, in fact, reaping the fruits of its disastrous leasing of lands. The large cash payments received at the beginning of the term were spent as soon as they were received; and the small quit-rent did not represent adequately the value of the land. And while the income of the House was small and fixed, the price of food showed a steady and alarming tendency to rise, owing to the economic changes which were coming over the country. The introduction of sheep-farming upon a large scale, a succession of bad harvests, occasional outbreaks of pestilence, combined to produce a state of affairs which was as bad as it very well could be for those with fixed incomes and growing expenses. Moreover, we have seen reason to doubt whether the Abbey of St. Alban had ever lived strictly within the income derived from its estates. These estates, owing to the change in economic conditions, were now least of all fitted to provide the House with adequate financial support. And on account of its proximity to London, the Abbey found the burden of hospitality rather tended to grow than to diminish. During the latter part of the fifteenth century, the accommodation of the stately guest-hall proved utterly insufficient for the press of travellers, so that Abbot Wallingford was obliged to allow a local innkeeper to fit up a chapel for the use of such guests as were crowded out of the Abbey.[1] Even in its declining years, as an eye-witness has testified,[2] St. Albans remained a House famous for its entertainment of "noblemen or Embassedors or strangers of eminent quality". It is not, therefore, difficult

[1] "Registrum Johannis Whethamstede," ii. 269. Riley takes a different view. "Registrum Johannis Whethamstede," ii. xxxiii.

[2] Bodl. MS. Ashmole 1137, fol. 51.

to see how the burden of this hospitality, combined with the cost of maintaining a convent which on the day of dissolution numbered nearly forty members, must, in that time of rising prices, have constituted a burden which became at last insupportable. The ordinary expenditure of the House must, as we have seen, have absorbed most of the available revenue, leaving little or nothing for extraordinary repairs to the fabric, for the payment of taxes, for the additional expenses entailed by an exceptionally bad harvest. In consequence, the financial position of the House became more and more disquieting as the sixteenth century wore on, and signs of the resulting feebleness are not lacking.

Before the death of Ramridge in the year 1519, the Priory of Tynemouth had been released from subjection to the embarrassed House, on condition that the ancient dues were still paid.[1] When the old Abbot had passed away, a yet heavier blow was dealt to the dignity of the Abbey. The most honourable among the Benedictine Houses of England was given to Cardinal Wolsey to be held *in commendam*, the temporalities being restored to him on 7 December, 1521.[2] What part the convent played in the matter is unknown: that such an infringement of the ancient dignity of the House should have been permitted is eloquent testimony to its weakness. The financial condition was, indeed, extremely alarming. In August, 1523,[3] the House was so far in debt that no fixed contribution could be assigned to it by the convocation which was granting a subsidy to Henry VIII; and the amount of the contribution had to be left to the discretion of the new Abbot. Indeed, why Wolsey acquired a House of whose financial condition he cannot but have been aware, it is difficult to say. He may have desired to save the ancient Abbey from ruin and bankruptcy, or, knowing its state to be hopeless, may have desired to secure some portions of its property for his projected foundations at Ipswich and Oxford. To this latter supposition some force is lent by the fact that in

[1] "C.L.P.," 14 Nov., 1519. [2] *Ibid.* 17 Dec., 1521.
[3] *Ibid.* 14 Aug., 1523.

1528 he obtained permission to suppress the cells of Wallingford and St. Mary des Prez, and to alienate their movables.[1] During the reign of Wolsey, the Abbey remained under the control of the Prior, Robert Catton, who was assisted in the work of administration by a supervisor appointed by Wolsey.[2] Apparently the Cardinal never resided at St. Albans, although he must have partaken of its hospitality many times on his way to and from London. He made some gifts of plate to it, and seems to have taken a great interest in the place. He was a vigorous, if somewhat high-handed assertor of the ancient liberties of St. Alban, and his zeal in defending the House from the exactions of royal officials and the greed of those who desired to profit by its weakness, aroused such ill-feeling that his conduct in this respect inspired three of the Articles of Complaint presented against him at the time of his downfall.[3]

In the few months which intervened between the fall and the death of Wolsey, he was suffered to retain the Abbey. On his death in November, 1530, he was succeeded by the Prior, Robert Catton, who has been made the subject of much undeserved eulogy by those who have not taken the pains to unearth his history. Before his election, presumably, he had made the acquaintance of Wolsey's servant, Thomas Cromwell, for when Abbot he showed himself the obedient slave of that rising politician. In October, 1534, Cromwell obtained for his friend and servant William Cavendish some leases of Abbey property on advantageous terms, Catton being employed to put pressure upon the reluctant convent.[4] In order that the property might not be recovered by the heirs of the donor under writ of "contra formam collacionis," Robert took care to make the grant take the form of a very long lease, and wrote to Cromwell with modest pride to explain his ingenious scheme. The relations between the two seem to have been intimate, although the obsequiousness of the Abbot plainly shows that he realized how valuable was the favour of his patron.[5]

[1] "Rymer," xiv. 243. [2] "C.L.P.," 1 June, 1528. [3] "Dugdale," ii. 207.
[4] "C.L.P.," 11 Oct., 1534. [5] *Ibid.* 6 May, 1533; 22 Jan., 1536, etc.

Catton's position was, in fact, very delicate owing to the financial weakness of the House, and to the openly-expressed objection of the convent to his policy of lining the pockets of his friends at the expense of the Abbey. The discipline of the House in these its last days was none the less excellent. In 1535 the visitation of the monasteries took place, and in October of that year came John ap Rice to St. Albans on behalf of Cromwell. He reported that he had found "little, though there was much to be found".[1] He probably referred to the peculation of the Abbot, which he knew it was useless to bring to the notice of his master: for in the following December the Prior and certain of the convent wrote to Sir Francis Bryant, the personal and political rival of Cromwell, begging him to take pity upon the misery of the House, for the Abbot would not heed their complaints. They affirmed that Catton was about to appoint a man notoriously unfit to the post of general receiver of the revenues of the House. They begged (1) that the Abbot might not be suffered to waste or sell the woods without the consent of the convent, and that the sales lately made might be stayed; (2) that the Abbot might be compelled to disclose the financial state of the House; (3) that they might not be compelled to affix their seal to new deeds of borrowing before the old had been paid off; (4) that those who had petitioned the Abbot to amend his ways might not be oppressed or expelled.[2] While the convent appealed to Bryant, Catton wrote to Cromwell, thanking him for past favours and praying for a continuance of them.[3] The Abbot evidently obtained the support he desired; for in April, 1536, the same section of the convent addressed a despairing letter to Bryant, imploring his help before the Abbot took dire vengeance upon their temerity. "Our monastery is in much decay and misery," they said, and they went on to state that matters would never be well ordered so long as the Abbot might do his will.[4] Shortly afterwards, one of Catton's enemies, the prior (terce) William Ashwell delivered himself

[1] "C.L.P.," 21 Oct., 1535.
[2] No. 1155, Dec., 1535.
[3] "C.L.P.," 22 Jan., 1536.
[4] *Ibid.* 9 April, 1536.

into the Abbot's hands by exclaiming with more truth than discretion "that the King would pull down the great Houses like the little ones". Whereupon he was sent up to Cromwell to undergo the penalty of his treasonous remarks.[1] The Abbot was now, thanks to Cromwell, master in his own House. But he soon afterwards got himself into trouble in another direction by attempting to seize the son of a widow, named Joan Creyke, as his ward. This time Cromwell did not support him, and Catton was compelled to promise to do right in the matter.

But the time was approaching when the dissensions of Abbot and convent would cease for ever. In 1536 the cells of Hatfield, Pembroke, Belvoir, Binham, and Hertford suffered dissolution along with the smaller monasteries; and in the autumn of 1537 the visitors Legh and Petre came to St. Albans. As a result of their visitation, they reported that they had found ample cause for depriving the Abbot, both from his own confession and from that of the monks. But the financial position of the House was so bad that they feared that, if he were deprived, no one could be persuaded to take up the position. They were also perplexed at the attitude of Catton, who, despite his misdeeds, scoffed at the idea of surrender. They asserted in terms of scarcely concealed innuendo, that the Abbot must be relying upon some protector in high position.[2] That protector was, of course, Cromwell himself. But Catton was mistaken in thinking that he could rely upon the Vicar-General's friendship in his hour of need. He was deprived in January, 1538:[3] but none the less, Cromwell had arranged for him a pension of £80 chargeable upon the Abbey.[4]

The House was now commonly regarded as doomed. The gossipping John Husee writing on 17 January, 1538, says: "St. Albans is not yet suppressed, but it is daily looked for".[5] All

[1] "C.L.P.," 24 Aug., 1536. Nothing very serious happened to him: for he witnesses the Deed of Surrender in December, 1539.

[2] "Dugdale," ii. 249.

[3] *Ibid.* "C.L.P.," 1538, vol. i. 181.

[4] "C.L.P.," 19 Sept., 1538.

[5] *Ibid.* 17 Jan., 1538.

that was done, however, was to delegate to Cromwell the convent's right of election, with the result that Richard Borman, sometimes called Stevenage from his birthplace, was appointed the last Abbot of St. Albans. He soon got into monetary difficulties, and was imprisoned by Gostwick, Cromwell's secretary, for failure to pay his dues to the King.[1] His position was moreover complicated by the machinations of the ingenious Catton, who, not content with his pension and the possibility of spiritual promotion, attempted, by using Cromwell's name, to force Borman to sign a bond which would expose the Abbey to a penalty of £1000.[2] But on this occasion he appears to have over-reached himself, and to have lost the favour of his patron for all time. On the dissolution of St. Albans he disappears from history. His pension was never paid. In spite of all these difficulties, Borman held bravely on. He paid his dues into the Exchequer throughout the whole of 1538; and not until December, 1539, did the impossible financial position compel him to surrender into the King's hands.[3] With the signature of this document by the Abbot and his convent of thirty-eight monks, the history of the House comes to an end.

The question naturally arises as to the services performed by the Abbey to society at the time of the dissolution. In what did they consist, and were they sufficient to have justified its existence if the finances of the House had permitted a longer life? Owing to the aforesaid disappearance of the Hertfordshire surveys of the "Valor," but little evidence exists for answering these questions, and we have for the most part to content ourselves with general impressions, supplemented by the exacter knowledge that Professor Savine has unearthed from the columns of the "Valor". In the first place, the sympathies of the House remained to the last aristocratic. Among the names, thirty-nine in number, appended to the act of surrender, there is not one which comes unquestionably from the lower classes. Those who were admitted to the privileges of fraternity were to the last men of birth and breeding. In its

[1] "C.L.P.," 31 Jan., 1538. [2] *Ibid.* 19 Sept., 1538.
[3] *Ibid.* 5 Dec., 1539. "Dugdale," 249-50.

hospitality the House was undoubtedly democratic in some measure; yet here again it was as a place of entertainment for distinguished persons that it to the end maintained its reputation.

In one sphere, at all events, St. Albans preserved its traditions to the very last. As long as the Abbey endured, the library was well cared for. The antiquary Leland, who visited it only a few years before the dissolution, spoke in warm praise of the courtesy and learning of the scholarly Prior, Kingsbury, who showed him the treasures which were contained within its book-presses.[1] Unfortunately, Leland has preserved the names of nine only. Nor was the work of the House in the cause of learning confined to the maintenance of culture within its walls. The scholar-monks at Oxford lived in the St. Albans *studium* until the death of Wolsey, at which time the shortage of money appears to have led to their recall. But most important of all the educational enterprises of the House was the steady maintenance of the Grammar School of St. Albans. In connection with Abbots Geoffrey and Warin we have had occasion to notice this famous institution, which reflects so much credit upon the House supporting it. In the thirteenth century, under John of Hertford, sons of the nobility had dwelt within the Abbey, and had received their education at the school a hundred yards outside the great gate. The school was not a charitable institution; its social standing made this impossible. It was only the sixteen poorest scholars who paid no fees. The others all contributed to the support of the Master who was never a monk. About the beginning of the fourteenth century, however, began the custom of receiving a number of poor boys into the almonry, who were entitled to free education at the school. The consequence of this was that the school seems to have grown more and more democratic in tone. It was never in any sense an "avenue to the monastery," although the abbots to the last remained its patrons. The master was a dignified personage, who had the sole privilege

[1] Tanner, "Bibliotheca," 613. Leland, "Collectanea" (1774), iv. 163.

of conferring secular education within the liberty of St. Alban. All "adulterine" institutions were eradicated, so that the school of St. Albans became the centre for the whole neighbourhood. The school continued to flourish until the time of the dissolution, but was then dissolved, by a stretch of legal terms, as part of the Abbey. It was afterwards established on a different footing, as a borough institution, under the direction of Richard Borman, the last Abbot. Probably its continuity of existence was never really interrupted.[1]

On the whole, therefore, the Abbey may be said to have been earning its income at the time when it ceased to exist. None the less, dissolution appears to have been inevitable, if only on account of the inability of the financial resources of the House to support the strain placed upon them. If the Abbey was to have continued in existence, the only course would have been to have endowed it upon a liberal plan, which would have enabled it to fulfil with ease the functions of hospitality and of education which now pressed so hard upon it. Such a course was wholly out of keeping with the ideas of the age, which, eminently distinguished as it was for hard practical tendencies, could not sympathize with the ideals of the life contemplative. The actual process of dissolution, however, was accompanied by all those sordid details which still invest it with such pathos to modern sensibilities. While we cannot fully realize the grief of the brethren who found themselves turned into the world upon a meagre pension while the House they loved was laid desolate, we can in some measure feel with and for them.

The spoil of St. Albans was distributed with remarkable celerity. Twelve days after the dissolution, the sacred vessels and treasures of the shrine were brought away for the King's use. Altogether there was more than 100 ounces of pure gold, some 1000 ounces of parcel gilt and silver, and about 3000 ounces of gilt plate. The property of the Abbey was distributed as the King would. The Lady Anne of Cleves, Cavendish, Russel, and many other persons of less note, received a share

[1] "Vict. C. Hist. Herts.," ii. 47-56.

of the spoil. The site of the Abbey was granted to a certain Sir Richard Lee, who, with a utilitarian thoroughness typical of the age which gave English monachism its death-blow, razed to the ground all the conventual buildings on the south side of the Abbey hill for the sake of the material. Only the church itself and the great gate were preserved, purchased by the townsfolk who had for so long groaned beneath the sway of the House. These edifices to-day remain the only traces above ground to mark the site of the noble monastery which upheld for so many centuries the fame of the Proto-martyr of England.

In the time of Mary, indeed, there was a project to revive the Abbey, and to place it once more under the control of Borman, who was still living. But the Queen died before any steps could be taken, and the poor old Abbot-schoolmaster, his hopes shattered, died too of pitiful disappointment. In the reign of James II also, a collection was made for the purpose, apparently, of establishing a Benedictine community at St. Albans: but this again came to nothing. The blow to St. Albans had once for all laid low the pride of the House; and had fulfilled to the letter the prophecy which Langland had spoken many years before to an incredulous world:—

> Ac ther shal come a kyng
> And confesse yow religiouses,
> And bete yow as the Bible telleth
> For breaking of youre rule: . . .
> And thanne shal the abbot of Abyngdone
> And al his issue for evere
> Have a knok of a kyng
> And incurable the wounde.

APPENDIX I.

"FOUNDATION CHARTER" OF ST. ALBANS, A.D. 793.
(MS. Cott. Nero D i. fol. 148.)

† Regnante domino nostro Ihesu Christo in perpetuum. Decet igitur ut regalis benignitas omnipotentis dei et sanctorum martyrum quantum valeat honori preuideat. Quia honor dei et pia in sanctis ejus deuotio stabilitas est regni terreni, et prosperitas longæuæ uitæ et indubitata æternæ mercedis retributio. Unde ego offa rex Mercianorum cum Egfrido filio meo et omni consensu synodali, pro remedio et salute animarum nostrorum, terram quinquaginta mansionum in locis infra dictis, id est, ubi dicitur æt Cægesho mansiones XXXIIII on dæt Heanhamstede VI mansiones et Stanmere . X . mansiones, cum segitibus, pratis, pascuis et siluis et omnibus rebus mobilibus uel fixis ad ea prenominata loca rite pertinentibus, domino meo Ihesu et Sancto Albano martyri, cuius reliquias in spem prosperitatis præsentis et futuræ beatitudinis diuina ostendit nobis gratia in ius monasteriale tradens donabo : quatinus perpetuo iure prefata terra sancti martyris Albani ecclesiæ deseruiat. Et per magnum omnipotentis dei nomen et terribile eius iudicium adiuro, immo et impero, quod nullus superuenientibus temporibus seu rex seu episcopus aut aliqua magna uel parva persona aliquid de his meis donis quæ deo et sancto martyri eius dedicauero, immutare seu auferre, seu imminuere præsumptuose audeat : ne aliquam molestiam aut ecclesiæ aut siluis ad eam pertinentibus inferre præsumat, sed sit libera omnino ab omni tributo et necessitate seu regis, seu episcopi, ducis, iudicum, comitum, exactorum etiam, et operum quæ indici solent necnon et expeditionis et omni edicto publico, perpetuo eam libertate donabo. Sed obsecro quatinus studeant

supervenientes reges auxiliare, defendere, et curam illius ecclesiæ habere in omni bonitate, sicut et ego habeo, ut sit illis et regno eorum benediccio et proteccio a domino deo et sancto eius martyre in perpetuum. Si autem quisquam loci huius curam non habuerit uel eum malitiose tractauerit, sciat et sentiat sancti martyris seipsum benedictione priuari et rationem ante tribunal Christi redditurum. Hoc uero monasterium cum his præfatis terris Willigoda presbiter habeat et regat dies suos, et monachicam in eo uitam vivat doceat et quantum ualeat erigat. Post dies autem illius eligant sibi fratres cum consilio illius episcopi qui super eos erit, si habent dignum et monachicæ uitæ eruditum, ex semet ipsis quem uolueriut. Si autem quod non opto acciderit quod ibi dignus nequeat inueniri, preuideat ille episcopus cum consilio fratrum, qui illud monasterium digne secundum regulam monachicæ uitæ gubernare sciat et uelit.

Iam iamque, iterum iterumque, in nomine domini præcipio et adjuro, quatinus in eo loco regula sancti Benedicti abbatis doceatur et exerceatur, quantum possibile est, perpetuo iure. Etsi ipsa elemosina oret ad dominum pro faciente, tamen obsecro et assiduæ intercessionis pro anima mea et amicorum meorum, canonicis horis semper in ea ammoneantur ecclesia : quatinus omnipotentis dei clementiæ quæ tale thesaurum temporibus meis gentibus et populis Anglorum aperire dignata est, mihi quoque aeternum cœlis thesaurum cum sanctis suis donare dignetur. Scripta est hæc cartula anno dominicæ incarnationis DCCXCIII, indictione III, anno uero Offani regis Merciorum XXXVI in loco celebri qui dicitur Celchyth, præsente synodali conuentu, testibusque infra nominatis confirmata. Data die regnante domino meo in perpetuum.

† Ego Offa hanc donationem meam signo crucis Christo confirmo. † Ego Ecfridus similiter consentio et subscribo. † Ego Ceoluulfus rex ad ipsum consentio. † Ego Cenuulfus rex consentio. † Ego Beornulfus rex. † Ego Ludecha rex. † Ego Uuilaf rex. † Ego Ecgbirhtus rex. † Ego Beorbulfus rex. † Ego Burhredus rex. † Ego Ælfredus rex. † Ego Higberctus archiepiscopus consensi et subscripsi. † Signum

Aepelheardi archiepiscopi. † Signum Ceolwulfi episcopi. † Signum Hunwone episcopi. † Signum Ceolmundi episcopi. † Signum Ealcheardi episcopi. † Signum Aelfhuni episcopi. † Signum Heaberti episcopi. † Signum Heathoredi episcopi. † Signum Cyneheardi episcopi. † Signum Deneferdi episcopi. † Signum Cenwalchi episcopi. † Signum Wermundi episcopi. † Signum Wihthuni episcopi. † Signum Wynberhti episcopi. † Ego Wicga dux. † Ego Aeþemundus dux. † Hearbertus dux. † Brorda dux. † Binna dux. † Esne dux. † Heaberht dux. † Cudberht dux. † Ceol. † Aemund dux. † Ceolweordus dux.

APPENDIX II.

"SECOND CHARTER" OF OFFA TO ST. ALBANS.

(MS. Cott. Nero D i. fol. 148*a-b*; repeated with interpolations on fol. 151 and fol. 151*b*.)

Regnante in perpetuum Deo et Domino nostro Jesu Christo. Licet per totum ubique mundum beatorum martyrum, qui suum pro Christo Sanguinem fuderunt, merita divinæ laudis exultatione celebranda sint, eorumque Dei auxilio exempla gloriosa sequenda, præcipue nobis tamen beatissimi Albani, qui sub hac Britanniæ insula gloriosus martyrio effulsit, memoria pia semper intentione et sedula sollicitudine observanda est. Unde ego Offa gratia Dei rex Merciorum, cum filio meo Ecgfrido, pro amore omnipotentis Dei et hujus sancti intercessione, terram XXX manensium in locis quorum subinferuntur nomina Domino meo Jesu Christo, ad ecclesiam Sancti Albani, ubi ipse tyro primus in passione victima effectus est, jure perpetuo perdonabo. Eoque delectabilius hanc donationem perficio, quia superna protectio tam nobile temporibus nostris thesaurum, quod diu fuit clausum et hujus terræ indigenis abditum, revelare dignata est. Hæc itaque sunt supradictarum vocabula terrarum: Et Uuineshawe duodecim manensium, cum terminis suis, Et Scelfdune sive Baldingcotum, trium manensium, quorum scilicet trium manensium terminati sunt hæc; Suanaburna, Heortmere, Stret Uuealebroc: item vero x manensium, ubi dicitur Scuccanhlau vel Fenntunn, cum silva quæ cognominatur Horwudu, cum terminis suis: Aet Lygetun v manensium, quam videlicet terram Alhmundus abbas expeditionem subterfugiens mihi reconciliationis gratia dabat. Hoc quoque consentientibus episcopis meis et abbatibus, ducibus et principibus, sub invocatione Sanctæ Trinitatis et individuæ Unitatis

donando præcipio, quatinus tota terra illa sit libera ab omni tributo et necessitate seu regis seu episcopi ducis iudicis et exactorum et operum quæ indici solent: neque emendatione pontium neque fossam adversum inimicos faciendam, totum omnæ præfatæ terræ stipendium et exactio ad supradicti martyris tumbam insolubiliter persolvatur. Et si forte quis intra ejusdem ecclesiæ potestatem aut extra cum episcopo seu abbate communis inveniatur, bello, furto, vel fornicatione, aut alio quolibet simili reatu astrictus: semper ea pars pœnæ et emendationis quæ regi vel episcopo debetur, ad beati Albani monasterium inviolato semper fœdere reddatur. Credo enim et veraciter confido quod hæc munificentia no[illegible]olum mihi meisque, sed etiam universis Anglorum populis, sullimiter proficiat: quia pro ejus amore ille miles intrepidus meruit coronari, qui totius mundi pericula passus est suo sanguine expiare. Hæc sunt nomina testium, qui hanc donationem meam consentientes signo crucis Christi confirmarunt. † Ego Offa Rex huic donationi meæ signum crucis impono. † Ego Ecgfridus paternæ munificentiæ consentiens subscripsi. † Ego Higbertus archiepiscopus consensi et subscripsi. † Ego Heothored episcopus consensi et subscripsi. † Ego Ceoluulfus episcopus consensi et subscripsi. † Ego Unwona episcopus consensi et subscripsi. † Signum manus Alhmundi abbatis. † Signum Beonnan abbatis. † Signum Wimundi abbatis. † Signum Forthredi abbatis. † Signum Brordani patricii. † Signum Binnani principis. † Signum Aesuuini ducis. † Signum Alhmundi ducis. † Signum Uuigberti ducis. † Signum Aethelmundi ducis. † Signum Eadgari ducis. † Signum Heardberti ducis. † Signum Ealhmundi ducis. † Signum Cuthberhti ducis. † Signum Wulfheardi ducis. † Signum Ealheri ducis.

Perscripta est autem hujus donationis cartula anno Dominicæ incarnationis DCCXCV, indictione quinta, et regni regis Offanis XXXV, sub quarto nonas Maias in loco qui dicitur Aet Beranforda.

APPENDIX III.

NUMBERS OF CONVENT OF ST. ALBANS.

Time of John de Cella.	Not more than 100.
1380	58
1396	52
1401	54
1451	46
1476	48 or 49
1492	54
1529-30	48
	(+ 6 at Oxford)
1539	39

See "V.C.H. Herts.," iv. 413.

APPENDIX IV.

ST. ALBAN'S LAND IN DOMESDAY.

(*a*) *The Land.*

Former Assessment	179·1 hides.
Assessment in 1086	170·6 hides.
Carucates	244
In Demesne	66·75 hides.
Meadow	77·5 carucates.

(*b*) *The Inhabitants.*

"Englishmen"	2
"Frenchmen"	21
"Burgesses"	46
Villeins	298
Bordarii	87
Cottars	51
Slaves	30

(*c*) *Sundries.*

Mills worth	£10 15 4
Pannage for	5110 pigs.
Value T.R.E.	£277 19 4
Value in 1086	£284 11 4

APPENDIX V.

THE REVENUE OF ST. ALBANS IN NICHOLAS IV's *TAXATIO* OF 1291.

Revenue from Spiritualities, Tithes, etc., in the Archdeaconry of St. Albans	£297	2	0
Revenue from Temporalities in the Archdeaconry of St. Albans . .	392	8	0
Total Revenue from Spiritualities, in round numbers	450	0	0
Total Revenue from Temporalities, in round numbers	400	0	0
Gross Revenue, in round numbers .	850	0	0

APPENDIX VI.

PROPERTY OF THE ABBEY AT THE TIME OF THE DISSOLUTION—TEMPORALITIES AND SPIRITUALITIES.

Total Revenue of the House . .	£2102 7 1¾
Derived from the following Sources (in round numbers) :—	
Tenants at Will	£2
Customary Tenants	480
Free Tenants	110
Manors and Tenements farmed out . . .	700
Tithes and Rectories	550
Mills	80
Manorial Courts	20
Miscellaneous Dues, farm of Bailiff of St. Albans, etc., about	180

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